

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 21 June 2006

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 21 June 2006*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, as it is every Wednesday. Our time for reflection leader today is George Weigel, biographer of Pope John Paul II.

**George Weigel (Biographer of Pope John Paul II):** Fifteen years ago, the 77-year-long civilisational emergency that began with the guns of August 1914 ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the most lethal form of tyranny in human history. Freedom, it seemed, had come safely through the perfect storm that was the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Pope John Paul II—who, in 1979, ignited the revolution of conscience that eventually produced the non-violent revolution of 1989 in central and eastern Europe—had some important things to say about freedom's 20<sup>th</sup> century victory over tyranny when he addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 1995. Let me commend some of his words to you this afternoon:

"Freedom is the measure of man's dignity and greatness. Living the freedom sought by individuals and peoples is a great challenge to man's spiritual growth and to the moral vitality of nations. The basic question which we must all face today is the responsible use of freedom, in both its personal and social dimensions. Our reflection must turn then to the question of the moral structure of freedom, which is the inner architecture of the culture of freedom.

Freedom is not simply the absence of tyranny or oppression. Nor is freedom a licence to do whatever we like. Freedom has an inner 'logic' which distinguishes it and ennobles it: freedom is ordered to the truth, and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth and in man's living in the truth. Detached from the truth about the human person, freedom deteriorates into license in the lives of individuals, and, in political life, it becomes the caprice of the most powerful and the arrogance of power. Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person—a truth universally knowable through the moral law written on the hearts of all—is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom's future."

Pope John Paul II concluded:

"The politics of nations ... can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of the human experience, and could never ignore it without harming the cause of man and the cause of human freedom. Whatever diminishes man—whatever shortens the horizon of man's aspiration to goodness—harms the cause of freedom. In order to recover our hope and our trust ... we must regain sight of that transcendent horizon of possibility to which the soul of man aspires ... And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit."

May all of us—heirs to the sacrifices of so many centuries in which freedom's cause was imperilled—be skilful custodians and stalwart defenders of the garden of freedom.

## Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill: Preliminary Stage

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4550, in the name of Margaret Jamieson, on behalf of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee, that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

14:34

**Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab):** On 8 June, the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee published its preliminary stage report on the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, in which it recommended that the Parliament agree to the general principles of the bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill. One member simply dissented from the committee's recommendations; no doubt we will find out exactly why he did so when he speaks this afternoon.

In its report, the committee made clear its belief that the Glasgow airport rail link—or GARL—could deliver real benefits, but it also recognised that there is scope for the bill to be significantly improved, particularly by linking GARL to other, wider transport developments. I will discuss the key findings of the committee's report and its recommendations in more detail, but first I will provide some background on the bill and our work, for the benefit of members.

The bill, which is being promoted by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, was introduced to the Parliament on 31 January 2006. Its principal objective is to authorise the construction of works in Renfrewshire and Glasgow to provide a new railway service between Glasgow airport and Glasgow Central station. The promoter has detailed in the bill the various pieces of work that need to be carried out to realise that vision.

In summary, the promoter's plan is to provide additional platform capacity at Glasgow Central station by extending an existing platform. GARL trains will travel along the existing mainline track between Glasgow and Paisley, which will require to be upgraded at various locations. A new branch line, which will run for approximately 2km, will be constructed from a point near Paisley St James station to the airport. The station concourse will be connected to the airport terminal building by an enclosed and elevated pedestrian link. Final decisions have yet to be taken, but the promoter envisages that the train journey between Glasgow Central station and the airport will take 16 minutes

and that there will be four trains per hour in each direction.

It was extremely useful for committee members to undertake site visits along the route of the proposed rail link at preliminary stage. They meant that we could more clearly understand exactly where the line will have to be constructed and how it will look.

In addition to providing powers relating to the construction of the specific works, the bill will provide other powers to the promoter. In particular, the promoter needs to acquire the necessary land and to avoid claims of nuisance as a result of the construction and operation of the works. It claims that the only practical method of obtaining those powers is through the bill. It also needs various consents, such as planning permission, listed building consent and consent to stop up and interfere with roads and paths. It has acknowledged that each of those consents could be sought separately, but has said that seeking them with the principal powers of the bill is convenient, quicker and probably cheaper.

The committee held eight meetings at preliminary stage, four of which involved extensive evidence taking from a wide range of witnesses. On behalf of the committee, I thank the promoter and all the other individuals and organisations that were involved in the process for providing a great deal of written and oral evidence, which was invaluable in informing the committee's scrutiny of the bill. I record my appreciation of Renfrewshire Council's sterling efforts in hosting two of the committee's meetings. I thank my fellow committee members for their contributions and their diligence in scrutinising the bill. For unavoidable reasons, Michael Matheson—whom I congratulate; he is now the proud father of a son, named James—and Marlyn Glen cannot be here, which is unfortunate. Finally, I thank the committee clerk and the clerking team for assisting us during preliminary stage, keeping us focused and ensuring that the committee ran smoothly.

I turn to the three main functions that the committee is required to report on at preliminary stage of the private bill process. First, the committee has to consider whether the bill should proceed as a private bill. There are two elements to that, the first of which is to decide whether the accompanying documents are satisfactory and allow for proper scrutiny of the bill. In essence, the committee agreed that while improvements could have been made to one of the accompanying documents—the promoter's memorandum—they were fit for purpose. The second, rather more technical, element is to decide whether the purpose of the bill is to obtain for the promoter particular powers or benefits in excess of or in conflict with the general law. Again, the committee

was content that the promoter clearly satisfied that requirement.

The second main function of the committee at preliminary stage is to consider the bill's general principles. Put simply, the committee asked itself whether constructing a rail link to Glasgow airport is a sensible policy to pursue. As members would expect, that deliberation took up the majority of the committee's time and it is the issue on which I will concentrate this afternoon.

First, however, I briefly turn to the third function of the committee at preliminary stage—to give preliminary consideration to the admissible objections that were lodged to the bill. There were 47 such objections, two of which have already been withdrawn. I make it absolutely clear that at preliminary stage the judgement that the committee has to make is whether objectors have demonstrated that they would be clearly adversely affected by the bill. Members will no doubt have been lobbied vociferously by objectors who may not have understood fully that that is the test that the committee must use. Where we did not believe that an objector demonstrated that he or she would be clearly adversely affected by the bill, their objection—or part of it—was rejected. Fifteen objections fell into that category.

It is worth making clear that the committee's decision to reject objections is neither vindictive nor unthinking, as has perhaps been portrayed. Even when we did not feel that the clear adverse effect test had been met, we realised that many objectors raised valid points in their objections. We were therefore scrupulously fair in ensuring that whenever an objector raised a substantive point that was relevant to preliminary stage, the promoter provided an answer on the matter. The promoter's responses can all be found in the *Official Report* and on the committee's web page. We agreed that all those objections that the committee classified as being to specified provisions of the bill should go forward for detailed consideration at consideration stage. Depending on the vote this afternoon, all the remaining objectors will be invited to provide further evidence on their objections at consideration stage. It is at that point that specific issues, such as the impact of the rail link on St James park in Paisley, could be examined in much greater detail.

Members may be interested to hear that if the bill proceeds this afternoon, the committee will use the services of an independent assessor at consideration stage. That is a pioneering approach—private bill committees have only recently been given that option, after the Parliament agreed that it could help to reduce the commitment for members at consideration stage. The assessor will consider any evidence that is provided by the promoter and objectors and report

to the committee accordingly. However, it will remain the sole duty of the committee to decide and report on the outstanding objections at consideration stage.

I will spend the remainder of my time talking about the third function of the committee at preliminary stage—namely, to consider and report on the general principles of the bill. It is only fair to summarise, for all members present, some of the benefits that the promoter claims will be delivered by the rail link.

The promoter has provided six detailed policy objectives, which can be found in full in the accompanying documents to the bill. To put matters into context, the promoter provided figures showing that 8.2 million people used Glasgow airport in 2003. It might be difficult to imagine, but that figure could double or even treble by 2030. Indeed, the Department for Transport estimates that 15 million people will use the airport by 2030, while BAA estimates that it will be 24 million people. The promoter believes that the rail link will play a vital role in serving the airport's expanding customer base. It estimates that 80 per cent of the air passengers who will use GARL would have previously arrived at the airport by private car or taxi.

The rail link will not only directly benefit those who travel to Glasgow airport. The promoter claims that the increase in capacity between Glasgow and Paisley will relieve pressure on that vital line, thereby helping commuters from adjoining areas. The committee welcomes that vision, which could improve train reliability, ease overcrowding and create additional jobs for parts of Ayrshire in particular.

The promoter also claims that GARL will directly deliver significant economic benefits, such as the creation of at least 65 jobs a year in Glasgow and Renfrewshire and a further 275 new jobs in tourism and leisure. Those economic benefits would benefit comparatively deprived areas of Scotland. The committee strongly supports that aspiration.

As members will expect, the committee has scrutinised the promoter's policy objectives in considerable detail and has not flinched from its duty of providing critical but constructive comment. While we broadly supported the vision shown in the policy objective, we also felt that some of the objectives overlapped substantially and were not always fully substantiated. For example, we should not forget that while the title of the bill refers to Glasgow airport, the rail link is also supposed to benefit Prestwick airport. Therefore, we were naturally concerned to hear the chief executive of the company that owns Prestwick airport suggesting that he was not entirely clear

about how GARL would contribute to his airport's future growth.

The committee also questioned the promoter's view that the additional track capacity provided by GARL could be further developed to improve transport connections to Inverclyde and Ayrshire. We acknowledged that if GARL increased line capacity, it could be used to provide additional train services to Inverclyde and Ayrshire, or even to and from Glasgow airport itself. However, considerable infrastructure and financial constraints would have to be overcome before any extra services were provided.

The committee's scrutiny of the bill's general principles went far beyond the promoter's policy objectives. We examined other crucial issues that could determine the success of such a major transport project, such as the rail link's likely number of customers and its environmental impact.

Any member who has ever travelled to an airport to go on holiday—perhaps with heavy luggage and young children in tow—will know that getting to Glasgow airport should be hassle free. We took the view that GARL passengers should have less hassle by having to make as few changes as possible—none at all, if possible. However, as the bill stands, the rail link would provide direct connections to the airport from only Glasgow Central and Paisley Gilmour Street stations.

We concluded that the best means of overcoming GARL's rather low patronage figures would be through a Glasgow crossrail scheme, which could enable passengers from further afield in Scotland to enjoy direct connections to Glasgow airport without having to change at Glasgow Central station. The crossrail scheme would increase patronage for GARL and have a direct impact on the business case.

Presiding Officer, I am aware that I am fast running out of time.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have so much time that you could be only half way through your speech at this point if you wished.

**Margaret Jamieson:** That is fine, because I still have a lot to say. I am sorry if I picked up the wrong vibe from you, Presiding Officer.

We have asked the Minister for Transport to consider the integration of GARL and crossrail in the rail strategy in Scotland.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Will the member give way?

**Margaret Jamieson:** Certainly.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Only for the fact that we have a wee bit more time, I would not have intervened. Will the member stress the importance

of reinstating and, indeed, improving the sporting facilities that will be affected at St James park?

**Margaret Jamieson:** The committee was heartened to hear that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport was working with sporting groups in the St James park area to ensure that, on GARL's completion, the facilities there would be the same, if not better. From what we have seen, we are assured that those facilities will be better. Indeed, the new drainage measures that will be introduced will mean that, unlike at the moment, all the pitches will be available the whole year round.

Returning to the importance of crossrail to GARL, I hope that the minister will be able to provide an update on the crossrail project; indeed, I am sure that most members would be delighted to hear that.

We have also asked the minister to report back to us on other developments that could affect GARL's case. For example, we understand that it is technically feasible to provide direct links to Glasgow airport for trains both from the south and west of Glasgow and from the east and the north of Scotland. We would very much welcome more detail on whether that would be a viable option.

One reason why the committee is so concerned about connectivity is that it is acutely aware of the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link Bill, which is currently going through the Parliament. As that scheme, which is known as EARL, will benefit from having far more direct rail connections to the airport, we have asked for further evidence at consideration stage on how EARL might impact on GARL's patronage.

We have also sought an update at consideration stage on the scheme's funding case. Given the concerns expressed in our report about how the funding case developed over the years to the point where the bill was introduced, we seek assurances that funding predictions are firmly on course. However, we fully appreciate that any final decision on funding is up to the Scottish Executive.

Although I am very much aware of the recent developments in the ownership of Glasgow airport, they came too late for the committee to consider them in any detail in its report. Given that Glasgow airport's support is crucial to the success of the GARL scheme, we will seek confirmation of its on-going support at consideration stage. Members should know that BAA is the only private sector company currently earmarked to provide funding for the scheme. Again, if the minister could provide an update on the matter I would be delighted to hear it.

I have made it clear that the committee is content that the bill should proceed as a private bill, while setting out clearly some of the



committee's concerns and certain issues on which we will seek more assurances at consideration stage. During that stage, detailed evidence will be taken from objectors and the promoter on outstanding objections. I expect both sides to take a great deal of effort to ensure that objections can be resolved in a mutually agreeable manner.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

14:54

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** I thank Margaret Jamieson and her colleagues for their work on behalf of Parliament in considering the bill. The point that she made about the assessor is important not only for the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee, but for those colleagues who are involved in scrutinising the two other bills for which that process will be used. We will look to her advice and that of her colleagues as to how effective that process is.

As she observed, the committee considered a large amount of evidence, both written and oral, during the preliminary stage of the bill. I would like to thank those who took the time to provide written evidence and those who appeared before the committee as witnesses.

The Executive strongly supports the general principles of the bill. The construction of a rail link direct to Glasgow airport is a key commitment in the partnership agreement. We therefore do not agree with Mr Monteith's position. I accept that his amendment was not chosen for debate; nevertheless, he gives vent to his views at some length in *The Herald* today. Mr Monteith might care to observe that, if we took the view that he takes on patronage, we would be unlikely to commit to any new rail investment. I draw the Parliament's attention to the Larkhall to Milngavie route, which is operating at some 35 per cent above the expected passenger number projections. That is a good outcome, not only for that line, but for the Scottish rail network as a whole.

Scotland's position in the world and its attractiveness as a place to do business and as a tourist destination depend on our global connections. Through the air route development fund, we have worked successfully in partnership with Scotland's airports to develop and achieve more year-round air links. Glasgow in particular has seen the phenomenal growth of the Dubai link with Emirates airline. That flight has also provided connections onwards to Australasia, India and China. We need to build on that success, and a key factor in ensuring the continued growth of

those routes is to have the necessary supporting transport infrastructure. Rail links to airports are an important part of that support infrastructure; as cities and countries compete for business and for tourists, they are essential.

Many cities that I have visited, in Europe and in other parts of the world, recognise that effective and affordable public transport links, especially heavy rail, are an essential part of being a competitive location, as I am sure members will agree. Glasgow—as is Scotland—is competing for international business both as a location and as a destination. To compete, we must improve. To improve, we must invest—and invest we will.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind):** Gatwick airport handles around four times the number of passengers who pass through Glasgow airport. Can the minister explain why the decision has been taken down south to axe the Gatwick express?

**Tavish Scott:** One of the interesting aspects of that matter is that BAA, the body that owns both Glasgow and Gatwick, has, as I understand it, been extremely critical of that decision. It wants to retain the Gatwick express because of how important it is to the airport. Although the express and the dedicated service may have been changed, there are trains running through Gatwick from Brighton and other locations, so it would not be fair to say—and I accept that Mr Monteith has not said this—that there are no train connections between Gatwick and the centre of London. The important point is that the airport operator, which is also the operator of Glasgow airport, was keen to see that express service retained. We can all draw our own observations from that.

The Glasgow airport rail link has the potential to bring direct economic benefits to Glasgow, to Renfrewshire and to the Scottish economy. Margaret Jamieson mentioned a number of those benefits in her speech, and I would like to highlight three in particular. First, 675 jobs over three to four years, and support for up to 135,000ft<sup>2</sup> of office accommodation in Paisley town centre could flow from that strategic investment. Secondly, a further 650 jobs could be brought to Glasgow and Renfrewshire over the next 10 years. Thirdly, there is the potential for 52,500 additional United Kingdom and overseas visitors to Scotland, who would contribute upwards of £10 million in additional expenditure every year. There are clear economic gains.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Given that the minister referred to potential usage figures, will he comment on the requirement for any rail link to be affordable, so that those who would like to use it can afford to do so? It is important to ensure that the rail link is not overpriced; if it is, people will not be encouraged out of their cars.

**Tavish Scott:** Yes. That is a fair point. I take the point in relation not only to this rail link but to the ScotRail franchise throughout the country. Affordability is key and it is one of the issues that we are taking forward as part of the rail review, which Margaret Jamieson mentioned. I encourage members who have points that they would like to raise on the matter to make them in the context of the national transport strategy.

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** The committee states at paragraph 146 of its preliminary stage report on the bill that it

“believes that GARL is a scheme that could be significantly bolstered with the concurrent development of a cross-rail scheme in Glasgow.”

Does the minister agree?

**Tavish Scott:** I will come on to deal with the Glasgow crossrail scheme shortly. On Mr Butler's point, it is fair to recognise that the on-going assessment of the project is exactly that: on-going. Work is still to be done as part of the full assessment of the project. It was explained to me some weeks ago at the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail, which Bill Butler convenes, that some aspects of the crossrail scheme are important in the context of both Glasgow transport and—as he made clear that evening—the network. I fully acknowledge the point.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Does the minister agree that the Glasgow airport rail link will, by increasing capacity between Glasgow Central and Paisley, increase the possibility of a 20-minute rail service between Ayr and Glasgow, which in turn would reduce traffic on the A77 and reduce pressure on the Kingston bridge? That is vital.

**Tavish Scott:** I agree with Mr Scott's points, although he might allow me to check the details carefully with those who can provide me with the figures. I certainly acknowledge the spirit of his comments.

The Glasgow airport rail link will directly create jobs and stimulate economic development in relatively deprived areas in the west of Scotland. Those benefits can be directly quantified and forecast; other benefits and jobs to which we cannot yet point could be created. The rail link will certainly have a positive economic impact on Scotland.

The committee's report highlights connections to the Scottish rail network as a whole as being central to its considerations. The committee states that it is concerned that the forecast patronage figures are low and that the airport rail link does not offer optimum connectivity—or connections, as I would rather say—for passengers. The committee has heard from several witnesses that a Glasgow crossrail scheme could—as Mr Butler has just suggested—provide for improved and

increased connections. I agree with the committee on the importance of wider connections. Ensuring that the rail link and the airports are linked into the wider transport network is a fundamental part of the scheme's successful delivery. As I said to the committee when we discussed the matter in Paisley several weeks ago, nothing in the Glasgow airport rail link proposals would inhibit a Glasgow crossrail project being taken forward in the future. On Margaret Jamieson's wider point, we will consider this as part of the rail utilisation study being undertaken by Network Rail—in other words, how we get the best out of the rail network across the country. She was right to draw attention to the work on rail that is being taken forward in support of the strategic projects review. That work will continue.

The committee has asked me to provide it with further information at the next stage of the bill process on the crossrail proposals and other issues about connections. I give the assurance this afternoon that I will do so.

The Glasgow airport rail link has a positive economic case and a developing and positive business case. As with all major projects, Transport Scotland will scrutinise the business case to ensure that the project remains on track and continues to represent value for money. The release of our funds is dependent on the continuing development of a robust business case.

The Glasgow airport rail link will cost £160 million at 2004 prices, which translates to an expected outturn cost of between £170 million and £210 million, depending on the rate of inflation. The Executive will be the major funder of the project. Transport Scotland is in discussions with BAA on the contributions that it will make to the Glasgow and Edinburgh airport rail links. The discussions are on-going and, for reasons that are, I hope, obvious, I cannot say exactly at what stage they are. Parliament is aware of the potential takeover of BAA. That has, inevitably, slowed the process of negotiation. However, our commitment to both airport rail links is clear and we are working hard to maximise contributions and secure the best outcome for public funds.

The quantified benefits of the rail link are important, but perhaps we should ask what we would lose if we were not to invest in the strategically important proposal. Would a multinational company choose not to locate in Scotland? Would an airline choose not to fly to and from Glasgow? Would we lose the passengers who would prefer to take the train rather than the car? We cannot answer with certainty, because many factors would have an impact on those choices but, as transport becomes an increasingly important element in the choices that companies and passengers make, it

increasingly affects economic growth in Glasgow and Scotland.

We are committed to building the rail link, and the Parliament has the opportunity to take the next step. Therefore, I ask members to support Margaret Jamieson's motion to agree to the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill.

15:06

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I congratulate the committee on a persuasive piece of work. The members who gave their time to consider the matter in detail put in a great deal of effort.

The Scottish National Party supports a Glasgow airport rail link in principle and therefore wishes the bill to proceed beyond preliminary stage. However, the committee's report identifies a very large amount of work that is yet to be done. The committee has considered a number of questions, and I will go through some of the points that it makes.

On connectivity, it is clear that the patronage figures for the rail link are estimated as being fairly low. To those of us who followed the project's progress before it came to the Parliament, that was clear from the research report that the Scottish Executive commissioned from Sinclair Knight Merz consultants. According to Mike Lunan, formerly of the Rail Passengers Committee Scotland, that research

"suggests there would only be 13 passengers on every train, and while that may fluctuate, the figures would certainly not seem to stack up. But cost implications are a matter for politicians."

How right he is.

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Is Mr Ewing the same Mr Ewing who was quoted in *The Herald* of 9 November 2004 as saying that the Glasgow airport rail link was a waste of money?

**Fergus Ewing:** It will be a waste of money if we do not ensure that the scheme is as successful as it should be, which is why I am referring to some of the committee's work. It is unfortunate that the promoter only belatedly provided figures on the levels of patronage. The committee—which includes Mr Arbuckle—concluded that those figures are relatively modest.

The main issue, which is the Glasgow crossrail scheme, has already been highlighted. Without the crossrail, the connection to Glasgow Central station would be a terminus for many passengers who wanted to travel on to other parts of Scotland—including Inverness, to take one location entirely at random. Is the Glasgow airport rail link viable without a crossrail scheme? The

committee will want to consider that at consideration stage as thoroughly as it has at preliminary stage. I was disappointed that we did not get a clearer steer from the Executive about what its thinking is on that because, without the crossrail scheme, the robustness of the case for the airport rail link is much reduced. In that respect, it is appropriate to make a comparison with the Edinburgh airport rail link.

The committee considered the policy objectives and would have expected the evidence used by the promoter to substantiate its claims to be much more concrete than it was. The committee's report says:

"For example, there was little empirical evidence presented to the Committee of the clear, causal link between an airport rail link and increased economic growth for the city or region it serves."

The promoter claimed that GARL would improve access to Prestwick airport, but Steven Fitzgerald, the chief executive of Infratil Airports Europe Ltd, said:

"I am not aware of the basis on which the promoter makes that claim."—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 8 May 2006; c 66.]

Well, he should know.

I agree with John Scott that a key benefit of this project, and a reason for supporting it, would be that people who currently drive from Ayrshire to Glasgow would be able to take the train. John encapsulated that point quite well.

**Margaret Jamieson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Fergus Ewing:** I will certainly take an intervention from the committee convener.

**Margaret Jamieson:** Confusion arises when individuals state that there will be a benefit to Ayrshire. There will be a benefit to north Ayrshire and south Ayrshire but not to east Ayrshire.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am grateful to the convener. I am happy to endorse her point—it is entirely correct.

The scheme's impact on traffic will be virtually negligible. Whatever its merits, the scheme will not take a significant number of cars off the road going into Glasgow. Paragraph 37 of the committee's reports says:

"The promoter provided very late supplementary written evidence to show that ... there would be a 2% reduction, by 2012".

That figure was an increase on the promoter's earlier figures of a 0.5 per cent reduction and then a total 0.8 per cent reduction by 2030.

There seemed to be disagreement between the promoter and Network Rail about the impact of the GARL infrastructure on the overall network.

Paragraph 49 of the committee's report shows that it was not clear how the objective of alleviating social exclusion would be tackled.

One of the main reasons for having such a scheme is to provide higher quality public transport. However, paragraph 57 of the report says that

"the final decisions on timetables, the fare structure and operating hours are still to be taken."

As the minister said, a leap of faith is therefore required to support that particular claim.

I was particularly disappointed that Simon Wallwork's alternative proposal, the cost of which would be a tiny fraction of the cost of the promoter's proposal, could not be considered in more detail by the committee—although I understand that the committee was limited by the procedures that it had to follow. The committee praised Mr Wallwork's proposal for a light rail scheme costing between £10 million and £15 million. The proposal would alleviate congestion and provide a park-and-ride scheme. I was disappointed that the promoter refused to meet Mr Wallwork before it presented its proposal to Parliament. I had asked the promoter to meet him.

The costs of the scheme have risen substantially. The minister now says that the cost will be between £170 million and £210 million. Like the minister, I will conclude by saying that support for this project will depend on the demonstration of a case that is extremely robust—financially and in every other respect.

15:14

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I, too, would like to thank the committee for its obvious diligence in looking into a number of matters. I congratulate the convener on the clarity with which she described the committee's work and its concerns. I was particularly pleased to hear her pledge to people with valid objections that they will have a chance to meet the committee and to give evidence again. That will be important.

The undoubted merits of the rail link scheme have been somewhat overshadowed by ministerial delay and—some would say—incompetence, which appear to have driven up the cost to the taxpayer and to have pushed the scheme back by up to two years. In March 2005, Strathclyde Passenger Transport hoped to have the bill introduced in the spring of that year, at a cost for the project of £140 million and with a completion date of late 2008. In October 2005, the bill had not been introduced, despite SPT having said that it was ready to introduce it in June. By that time, the costs had risen to £160 million. The SPT chair, Alistair Watson, warned in a letter to Tavish Scott, the Minister for Transport, that SPT was starting to

incur significant additional costs as a result of the delays that the Scottish Executive was imposing.

In January 2006, the minister envisaged a 2009-10 completion date. In March this year, in a statement to the Parliament, he claimed that the link was on target, at a cost of £170 million to £210 million, and cited the end of 2010 as the completion date. The upping of the cost has angered the bill committee, which at the beginning of the process was assured that the figure of £160 million was the grand total.

**Tavish Scott:** I am sure that Mr Davidson will accept that there is a difference between 2004 prices and the outturn costs that we expect at the time of completion, and that he will want to recognise that in his comments.

**Mr Davidson:** I hear what the minister says, but I think that he is still in some doubt about what the project will cost. There is an element of doubt about the projections. However, there is no doubt that delays have added to the cost. I am not sure why those delays took place, or what caused the chair of SPT to write to the minister.

It is important that the lack of clarity to which I have referred does not damage confidence in the project. Conservative members have long supported a Glasgow airport rail link, which was one of our manifesto commitments in 2003. Although we will support the bill today, we share the bill committee's view that improvements could be made to the existing proposals and agree with the committee that more work should be done on establishing options for direct links between the airport and destinations other than Glasgow Central. I have always believed that a rail link between Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street should be an essential part of connecting the airport to all parts of Scotland. As other members have said, that missing link is a disincentive for many people to consider going to Glasgow airport by train. I dispute the claims of the leader of Glasgow City Council. He seems to think that the lack of such a link will not affect the competitiveness of the airport—I think that it will. We must consider that for the future.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I may require clarification, but the crossrail scheme is not a link between Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen Street—a distance of a few hundred yards.

**Mr Davidson:** We seek anything that will provide connectivity between the airport and railway stations around the major cities of Scotland, from which customers will come.

In April 2006, BAA told me in a letter that there were major concerns about the impact of construction on airport operations and suggested that some elements of the bill might compromise

its ability to operate, expand and compete. I hope that the committee will consider that claim.

**Margaret Jamieson:** As the member will see from the *Official Report* of the committee's meetings, the issue of how Glasgow airport will conduct its business while construction takes place has already been explored. Does he accept that Glasgow Airport Ltd is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the scheme? It is the only private sector company that will benefit. It will receive significant moneys from the public purse to replace equipment that is beyond its natural life, namely the fuel farm.

**Mr Davidson:** That matter was pointed out to me when I visited the airport not long ago.

I was a little disappointed that VisitScotland and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport were not supportive of appearing before the committee, because the link with tourism is essential to get people out and about around Scotland, instead of keeping them in Glasgow and the rest of the central belt. All of us who have used Glasgow airport on a regular basis and have accessed it by road know the difficulties, but we must ensure that, whatever happens, people do not desire to use the car to get there. The project will not only help the environment, but improve access and increase people's desire to use the airport.

It is interesting that the committee was sceptical about some of the promoter's policy objectives, especially the suggestion that the rail link will provide services to the M8 and Ayrshire corridors. We heard the convener comment clearly on that issue.

The connectivity between the existing transport network and the new route is still unclear. The committee seemed surprised by the promoter's lack of consultation with the Scottish Independent Airport Park and Ride Association—major players in this regard.

As other members have said this afternoon, there are obvious concerns about the removal of a number of football pitches at St James park. I was very heartened by the convener's response to the intervention on that point.

The Conservatives agree that there are concerns about the lack of consultation on extra stops—for example, at Braehead—which gives the impression that the promoters ruled out such options themselves. It is fairly obvious that the long-awaited crossrail scheme would give a significant boost to the project. However, we need to ensure that our entire transport infrastructure is properly connected; there should be no gaps or missing links.

I repeat that the opening of a rail link to Glasgow airport was a Conservative manifesto commitment

in 2003. We are pleased to support the bill today, but we continue to be concerned about the specifics of the scheme as proposed. Cost overrun is one such concern, as is connectivity. There is also the failure to consult on options such as a link serving Braehead and Renfrew and to address some of the concerns that BAA raised. Obviously, we are also concerned about the possible takeover of the airport authority. We hope that that does not damage BAA's funding stream, which is part of the package that needs to go into funding this long-term project.

15:21

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** As a long-time supporter of the campaign in support of the establishment of a Glasgow airport rail link, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I commend the committee for its detailed report and its obvious hard work; it made a thorough-going investigation at stage 1.

The Glasgow airport rail link was a pledge in the Scottish Labour Party's 2003 manifesto and, following the last Scottish general election, it became part of the coalition partnership agreement. GARL will create a 15-minute service from Glasgow Central station to a new purpose-built station at the airport. Creation of the link will significantly enhance accessibility to and from the airport.

At a time of airport growth, with an estimated threefold rise in annual patronage at Glasgow airport to 24 million by 2030, modern high-quality infrastructure from Glasgow city centre to the airport is vital if we are to protect the airport's competitive edge. Additionally, by stopping at Paisley, the rail link service will provide extra travel opportunities and accessibility to the west coast areas of North and South Ayrshire and Inverclyde. Moreover, GARL has the potential to boost the competitiveness of Glasgow and its surrounding areas. It is estimated that it could support up to 1,300 jobs across Glasgow.

**John Scott:** Does the member agree that the promoter may have underestimated the benefits to Ayrshire, particularly North and South Ayrshire? After all, Alistair Watson, formerly of SPT, is on record as saying that the Ayr to Glasgow rail line is potentially one of the fastest growing rail routes in the UK.

**Bill Butler:** I hope that Ayrshire benefits, along with Glasgow and all parts of Scotland. I was just about to come to that. All power to Ayrshire—well, almost all power to all Ayrshire.

The total gross value added economic benefit from tourism, leisure and employment that GARL will generate is estimated at £3.14 million per annum. It is also estimated that GARL will add in

excess of £10 million per annum to Paisley town-centre-based employment. It will help to support Glasgow's expanding £112 million conference sector and will offer a significant asset to the 2014 Commonwealth games, if Glasgow's bid is successful—let us hope that it is.

The committee concluded, rightly, that the Glasgow airport rail link will improve job opportunities and contribute to regeneration in the west of Scotland—that includes Ayrshire. However, in the time that remains to me, I will focus on a key concern of the committee, which is connectivity or, as the minister said, “connections”. I, too, prefer the word “connections”. Other members mentioned this concern.

In paragraph 17 of its report, the committee said that it was clear

“that GARL does not offer optimum connectivity for air passengers”

and thus may not meet its objectives of encouraging more people out of their cars and on to rail to access Glasgow airport.

In paragraph 18, the committee concluded that

“greater connectivity could be provided by linking GARL more closely to other rail developments.”

In particular, the committee extolled the merits of the Glasgow crossrail proposal. At paragraph 146, the committee said:

“the Committee believes that GARL is a scheme that could be significantly bolstered with the concurrent development of a cross-rail scheme in Glasgow.”

The minister did not demur when I asked him whether he agreed with that conclusion.

I convene the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail and I could not agree more with the committee's wise words on crossrail. The minister was good enough to attend the most recent meeting of the CPG and he knows that the crossrail scheme attracts widespread support and would bring benefits throughout Scotland, including Ayrshire.

In October 2005, SPT completed a £600,000 feasibility study, which was funded by the Executive—credit where credit is due—and proved that the crossrail scheme is technically possible. It would require the laying of 1,890m of new double track at High Street, the reinstatement of the Strathbungo link and the construction of new sidings at Kelvinhaugh. The renewal and upgrading of some 3,550m of the city union line would allow a new station to connect with Glasgow's subway system at West Street, which would become an interchange station. Two new stations could be built at Glasgow Cross and Gorbals and the existing High Street station could be relocated and renovated.

I stress that the crossrail project is not just about Glasgow; it is widely regarded as the most important strategic rail infrastructure project in Scotland, because it would close a crucial gap in the Scottish rail network. Crossrail has the potential to join south-west Scotland to the rest of the country, by providing the missing link across Glasgow. It would open up a huge range of possible rail connections across Scotland and create concomitant potential for economic development and growth.

Given the need to enhance the network's capacity during the next three to five years, I hope that the minister will carefully consider the wisdom of the committee's recommendation on crossrail. The nationwide benefits that could accrue from the relatively modest outlay of between £115 million and £187 million are attractive, to say the least. GARL could bring even greater benefits to Glasgow and the rest of Scotland if crossrail were considered alongside the airport rail link. Crossrail has a vital role to play in building new connections across Scotland, which will be central to future economic success.

After I intervened during the minister's speech, the minister said that “nothing in the Glasgow airport rail link proposals would inhibit” the development of Glasgow crossrail. I welcome that remark, but I hope that the Executive soon casts off its inhibitions and gives its full backing to the Glasgow crossrail project. GARL is a welcome initiative, but it is only part of the story; let us complete the transport tale. Let the Executive agree soon to crossrail, which will have a nationwide impact and meet the need for improved cross-city and city region connections. I support the motion, but let us also hear it for crossrail.

15:28

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I am less expert on the geography of Glasgow than are previous speakers, but I will try to speak for areas outwith Glasgow that I represent in the Parliament or in which I have an interest as a result of my other activities.

A civilised country should have a railway system that can deliver people from their local station to the airport. It is pathetic that people in Scotland cannot take a train from their local station to Glasgow airport, but we are beginning to try to resolve the problem. It is also pathetic that both Glasgow and Edinburgh have an airport, because we could have built a good airport halfway between the two cities, which would have become a major British airport. However, the battle for such an airport was lost to parochialism 20 or 30 years ago.

A connection to Glasgow airport is essential. I have studied the proposition that Bill Butler and his

cross-party group are promoting, and there may be other ways of dealing with the matter. However, there must be a proper way of getting on a train in Stranraer, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Falkirk or wherever and ending up at the airport. That would make a huge difference to the service's attractiveness to people who do not want to have to get into one train, out of that train and into a bus to another train or another bus that gets stuck in the traffic on the M8.

**Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Is not one of the problems that what Donald Gorrie has just described is exactly what will happen? For instance, all the people in my area—even people who live on the East Kilbride line—will have to get a train to Glasgow, get off that train and get on another train in order to get to Glasgow airport. How many people who live in that part of the country will use the service if they cannot get a single train to the airport, given the fact that it is much easier for them to get into their cars or into taxis and go straight to the airport?

**Donald Gorrie:** I agree that we have to combat people's innate idleness and natural desire for convenience; therefore, we must provide a service that is convenient. The scheme should blossom forth. If we get a railway to the airport, that is a step forward at least, as we do not have even that at the moment. Then, we will have to connect it. That may not happen overnight, but Tavish Scott and his people must work out an effective system that we can pay for gradually, which will deliver people to the airport by train.

As other members have said, that will reduce the blockage on the M8 and on a lot of other roads, as well as making life much easier for people. Travelling by air is a hassle because of the difficulty of getting to the airport. Personally, I much prefer to travel by train if possible, but if we are to make good use of our airports, we must enable people to get to them from all over the country. That is an important point.

Concern has been raised in the past about the playing fields. The documents that we have suggest that that issue is being dealt with, but I was told recently that the numbers seem to be different on different pieces of paper when it comes to how many playing fields there are and how many there will be. Some of the playing fields have not been used for 10 years and are, therefore, not of much value. I hope that the committee will properly sort out the playing fields issue, because we certainly do not wish to reduce the number of effective playing fields—we are busy doing that in other ways already, and that is one of the worst things that is happening in Scotland. There must be at least as many—and better—playing fields after the project has been completed as there are at the moment.

I support the committee's efforts. The line is necessary, but it must spread out. There is no point in having a spider without a spider's web. We want to create the web.

15:33

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind):** As a member of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee, I pay tribute to the committee clerk, the private bills team, the convener and my fellow committee members for all the hard work that went into the production of the committee's report. Before I joined the committee, I heard that serving on such a committee would leave one working all hours, poring over papers and nearly not wanting to be brought out of anything other than the black hole of Calcutta. I have to say that the experience has been quite different. The committee was a joy and an experience that I looked forward to. Taking evidence from the promoter and the various witnesses and trying to get to the bottom of the case for a Glasgow airport rail link was a task that members warmed to as they found it becoming more and more interesting.

The report is a good piece of work. I support the principle of improved co-ordinated transport links to Glasgow airport and a rail link to Glasgow airport as part of that. The evidence of the likely passenger growth at Glasgow airport from 8 million to anywhere between 15 million and 24 million, depending whose figures we consider, shows that there is a need for improved infrastructure to support the numbers going to and from the airport.

Unfortunately, the promoter has failed to convince me that its proposal is the best possible scheme and should therefore be supported. I will explain why I feel that way. The report has 206 paragraphs. I was able to agree with 203 of them, but could not support the other three, which set out the conclusions. Although I agreed with the evidence that was presented and acknowledged the concerns that were expressed—some of which have been expressed today by committee members and others—I could not agree with the conclusion that the bill should proceed. The lack of connections and the operation of the system show up a flaw in the business case.

Passengers from north, north-west and north-east Glasgow, who travel to Queen Street, will need to transfer to Glasgow Central, often carrying all their luggage. Air passengers from Perth, Stirling, Falkirk, Helensburgh and Oban all fall into that category.

Passengers from Ayr and Gourock will have to change platforms at Gilmour Street. As anyone who has been there knows, that entails going down stairs, along corridors and then back up stairs.

Passengers from Hamilton and Kilmarnock who go into Glasgow Central will have to find the right platform, moving themselves to and fro, because there are no direct services.

I turn to passenger numbers. The trains will operate from 5.45 am to 11.45 pm. That sounds reasonable enough, but, unfortunately, when one considers the profile of Glasgow airport's operation, one finds that 24 per cent of passengers travel at times when the rail link will be no help to them. That is because many of the passengers at Glasgow airport take charter flights, which arrive either late at night or, especially, early in the morning. The rail link would not be available to someone checking in early, who would need to access it two and a half hours before their flight, or to someone arriving on an early flight—say at 5 o'clock. That would affect all flight passengers using Glasgow airport who wanted to access the scheme.

Members are aware that a more ambitious and expensive rail link is being proposed for Edinburgh airport, with better connections to the rest of Scotland. Unfortunately, the passenger projections for GARL do not take into account the introduction of Edinburgh's greater accessibility, which I suggest can have nothing other than a negative impact on passenger projections. We make calculations about whether flying or travelling by rail to London, for example, is better. We consider the ease of travel, the obstacles and travel time. Once passengers have made those calculations in relation to Edinburgh airport, there must be an impact on the passenger numbers for GARL.

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I take on board the issues that Brian Monteith raises in relation to connectivity. Will he join the Glasgow crossrail campaign and the cross-party group?

**Mr Monteith:** It is fair enough for me to explain how I will support that campaign, but I do not know whether it is proper for me as a member of the committee to sign up to the cross-party group. Paul Martin will certainly get the feeling that I am a supporter of crossrail.

The problems that I have set out can be overcome. Joining up the Glasgow rail infrastructure—Glasgow crossrail—would allow for direct services from all over Scotland. Extending the rail link's operating time, mainly in the morning—not to 24 hours—would enable more passengers to use the line.

Members might draw a different conclusion from me and decide that the bill should proceed. That is fair enough. However, I remind them of what happened at Manchester airport. It had the business case and the passenger projections. However, when the line was opened, it was found

that it was not used enough because there were no direct services to anywhere other than Manchester Piccadilly. Only when services to Lancaster, Yorkshire, Leeds, Sheffield and points north were introduced, along with a heavy marketing campaign, did people begin to use the service by taking trains from across England—even from Birmingham and Newcastle—to Manchester airport.

There is a case for GARL, but it is not yet strong enough. Crossrail must be recognised as the priority and it must be established first. From the promoter's figures, we can see that, even by 2030, the largest group of passengers who will be using GARL—some 47 per cent of travellers on the line—will be people commuting from Paisley to Glasgow. The proposed scheme is either an expensive commuter investment or it is a poor way of establishing what we all want to establish, which is a connected service that people from throughout Scotland can use.

Unless crossrail can come first, the bill is not worthy of support and we should ask the promoter to come back with a better scheme.

15:41

**Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** I have been experiencing déjà vu during this debate. In the middle of the last decade, when I was in Strathclyde Regional Council, I had responsibility for driving forward the implementation of not only a rail link to Glasgow airport, but a crossrail system. We were thwarted by five major structural upheavals: the privatisation of the rail industry; the reorganisation of local government; the 1997 general election; the fact that Gordon Brown froze the finances for two years after that election; and devolution, which established a Parliament in which some members thought that they were reinventing the world.

However, by November 2001, SPT—by which I mean Strathclyde Passenger Transport of blessed memory—was ready to promote a Glasgow airport rail link. However, it was asked by the Scottish Executive not to go forward because the Scottish Executive and the United Kingdom Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions wanted to conduct a wider study.

In case anyone has forgotten, I remind members that the city of Glasgow is Scotland's major centre of employment growth. Glasgow's new industries—finance, business services and tourism, to name but three—could drive Glasgow international airport from 8 million passengers a year to 24 million a year by 2030. That is the view of the airport's operators. However, the UK civil service's view is that, by 2030, there might be only 15 million passengers a year—how strange.



Tourism sustains some 50 million jobs in the Glasgow city region and business and conference tourism generates some £115 million of revenue annually in a city that is officially Europe's fastest-growing conference destination. The Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre alone generates £80 million of revenue annually.

Today, we must endorse GARL as an incremental step towards future proofing surface access to a growing Glasgow airport. Of course, as the committee rightly highlights, the crossrail scheme is needed to maximise the Scotland-wide benefits of a rail connection to Glasgow airport. However, that fact has been known for some time. The Sinclair Knight Merz report, which was published in 2003 for consideration by the Scottish Executive and the UK Government, examined 15 options for rail links to serve Glasgow airport, including several versions of the crossrail concept, which would link Glasgow airport not just to Glasgow city centre but to the wider rail network. The SKM report recommended none of the options, but stated that a version of crossrail was the least worst option. Of course, that conclusion was based on the dodgy UK Department for Transport projection of 15 million passengers per annum using the airport by 2030.

In February 2003, after the SKM report, Strathclyde Passenger Transport was prepared to promote a Glasgow airport rail link that included crossrail, but it was prevailed upon by civil servants to proceed only with the scheme that is now before us. How strange. Heaven forbid that anyone should think that there are civil servants around who want to set Glasgow up to fail. Tavish Scott need not allow the dodgy and strange views of certain civil servants to detain him—or us—if he makes a commitment to crossrail.

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am pleased that Charlie Gordon gave that explanation about the civil servants, but will he clarify whether that was under a Labour Government?

**Mr Gordon:** If Sandra White had been following my narrative properly, she would have been quite clear about that. When it comes to the interests of Glasgow, the party tag does not bother me.

Today, for a variety of reasons—the two best ones being the fact that, as Bill Butler mentioned, the project is a Labour manifesto pledge and a partnership agreement pledge—let us support the Glasgow airport rail link. If we, like the committee, support crossrail as well, let us keep the pressure on the minister to commit to it so that SPT can begin to promote it immediately. If SPT does not do that, perhaps someone else can. Let us move forward. Let us not put obstacles in Glasgow's way. Members should not be like Brian Monteith, who says that Glasgow deserves better but will vote for Glasgow to get nothing.

15:47

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I add my thanks to the committee and to all those who contributed to its work in producing the report. I am sure that the Minister for Transport will be delighted to hear that the Greens will be pressing their yes buttons this evening. However, I must say that the support that I can offer the bill is qualified, to say the least.

**Fergus Ewing:** More aviation.

**Patrick Harvie:** Mr Ewing should not worry—I will come to that.

I share some of Brian Monteith's reservations about the projected levels of use of the airport rail link, but I accept that such projections are sometimes underestimates and that the link might surprise us with its success.

The main reason why I qualify my support is that we are approaching the matter with the wrong set of priorities. If we had started with an assumption that we had a couple of hundreds of millions of pounds to spend and a determination to get traffic off the roads and on to rail, we would have started not with GARL but with the crossrail project. Charlie Gordon and Bill Butler explained many of the opportunities and advantages that lie behind crossrail. It is achievable and affordable and it would have benefits throughout the region. In a previous debate in the chamber, the minister, Tavish Scott, said:

"the project stands on its own merits."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 2006; c 24597.]

Crossrail would offer new services, new stations and new connectivity. I endorse Bill Butler's exhortation to us to drop our inhibitions on crossrail.

**Mr Monteith:** I hear what the member says about the Glasgow crossrail project. Having heard from Bill Butler about the relative costs of crossrail, does the member agree that it makes far more sense to go ahead with crossrail than to proceed with the Borders rail link, which will cost more and help fewer passengers?

**Patrick Harvie:** I would say that the Glasgow crossrail scheme makes far better sense as a priority than the airport rail link. However, that is not to say that I oppose the airport rail link. If we begin with crossrail, we might decide that it is probably a good idea to have a rail link to the airport, too. I will not turn up my nose at the airport link simply because the schemes are being considered in what I think is the wrong order.

I will challenge some of the policy objectives. What is the right reason for spending hundreds of millions of pounds on transport infrastructure? Mr Ewing will be delighted to know that I see only one candidate for the top priority to spend such

money—reducing our damaging impact on the world's climate. Climate change and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must be the top priority. We must reduce the congestion and air pollution from which people in Glasgow and the wider region suffer. Only once we have achieved those two priorities should we consider the convenience for people of moving to where they want to go and, after that, we can consider Scotland's international image.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the member give way?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am sure that Mr Ewing will tell us that climate change is all in our heads and that everything will be wonderful once we have burned Scotland's oil.

**Fergus Ewing:** The member guessed wrongly. I am puzzled about why the Greens, who are concerned about reducing emissions, support a project that will inevitably promote aviation and more use of aircraft—those are some of the reasons that the minister set out, some of which I agree with. Why do the Greens support the scheme rather than a fast rail link from Scotland to London, for example, which would limit in the long term the number of domestic flights between Scottish airports and London?

**Patrick Harvie:** I will discuss that in a moment.

It seems that image is the Executive's priority; some of the minister's speech reinforced that. The first issue of substance that the minister addressed was Scotland's international image and the idea that tourists who arrive at Glasgow airport will see a nice, gleaming and new airport rail link with carriages that are nice and clean because they are not used much, which will create a positive association with and positive image of Glasgow. That is no bad thing, but it is not a top priority.

The arguments about sustainability that have been mentioned as part of the bill's policy objectives are absurd, particularly—as Fergus Ewing is right to say—because those arguments are comprehensively undermined by political support for ever-greater growth of air traffic. There is a fundamental contradiction: if we want CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to go down, not up, we need to fly less, not more. The equation is simple.

I will put to bed the misrepresentation of Greens as being against all air traffic, which is certainly not true. However, we need to reduce, not increase, our dependence on aviation. One of the bill's policy objectives is

"To contribute to a sustainable basis for the ... growth of Glasgow and Prestwick Airports".

In paragraph 31 of its preliminary stage report, the committee said:

"In examining this policy objective, the Committee has not considered in detail all the factors that could constitute 'a sustainable basis for ... future growth'".

I do not blame the committee for not trying to get to grips with the detail of that, because there is no sustainable basis for everlasting aviation growth.

The way to address the matter of providing an airport rail link to take airport traffic off the roads and on to rail is to couple the link with measures to reduce and positively to inhibit road traffic to the airport. Road pricing is one way to do that.

Members including Tommy Sheridan have mentioned that fares are important and that the airport rail link must not be seen as a premium service as it is at other airports. I go further and say that we should argue that the road should be seen as the premium service. Road traffic is the form of transport that does the greatest damage and which must bear the greatest cost as a result. We can take significant measures to ensure that we use the rail link as a way of taking traffic off the roads and on to the rails and not as a way of increasing the total capacity for traffic to the airport, which will fuel traffic growth.

I repeat my qualified support and I absolutely implore the minister to go further than he has gone in supporting Glasgow crossrail as soon as possible.

15:55

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I thank the committee for all its hard work and hope that there will be a Glasgow airport rail link. I thank those who have supported such a link for years—decades, even. In particular, I thank Councillor Alistair Watson, who has done an enormous amount of work in pushing the GARL proposals through, and on the proposals for the Glasgow crossrail. I also thank the *Evening Times* for its campaign and continued support, which it has given every week to ensure that Glasgow gets the rail link.

I think that all members who have spoken have said that a rail link is overdue, and Charlie Gordon explained why it is overdue. We know that bids were submitted years ago, but that no scheme has come to fruition because of civil servants, inactive Labour Governments or whatever, which is absolutely disgraceful. We cannot agree that there should be inaction; we must say that the project must progress, so why are some members so inactive? They seem to be living in the past, but we cannot live in the past for ever. Members have mentioned the economics that are involved in terms of costs, passenger numbers and so on, but we must start somewhere—we will not get a Barcelona-type air link and integrated transport if we do not.

Stewart Maxwell mentioned East Kilbride. Perhaps when planners were considering new towns years ago, they should have thought about including rail links.

People cannot blame everything on the fact that there is no rail link to Glasgow airport, but we must start somewhere. We wanted to start on the Glasgow airport rail link many years ago, and we have now done so, for which I thank the committee.

We should not look at the matter in a parochial way—other Glasgow members have said that Glasgow people are not parochial. The project is not only for Glasgow; I was going to say that it is for Inverclyde, Paisley and Ayr, but I should not now mention East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and so on; I will simply say, therefore, that it will benefit parts of Ayrshire. It will certainly bring benefits not only to workers in those areas—it is bound to bring more tourists. A person who has come off a plane at Glasgow airport and who has stayed at a hotel in Glasgow might stay the next night in Paisley, Ayrshire or Inverclyde. If the scheme is properly marketed, which we should consider, people will have options. We should be much more forward thinking and forward looking. Members have said that people were not forward thinking many years ago. The scheme could have been up and running right now if there had not been inertia among members of the United Kingdom Parliament, members of the Scottish Parliament and civil servants.

The proposals are the right way to go. We are talking about a fantastic project that must go ahead. Why is it that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Glasgow international airport does not have a rail link? It is an absolute disgrace. We should not be arguing about figures such as 15 per cent or 20 per cent and about whether the economics are right, because the proper thing to do for the whole of Scotland—not only for Glasgow—is to proceed. As I said, it is a disgrace that we have not already done so.

**Mr Monteith:** I sense the member's enthusiasm for the rail link, but would any price be too much to pay for it?

**Ms White:** Obviously, a price must be paid to produce any link, but I cannot simply pluck a figure from my head and talk about 15 or 10 per cent of a figure being the right figure, for example. Mr Monteith is probably one of the members to whom I have referred as being stuck in the past. He is not looking forward. He and other members, including some who are not present, are not enthusiastic about pushing forward the scheme. Scotland—not just Glasgow—desperately needs the link.

It is also imperative that the crossrail link be built. Bill Butler mentioned the 2005 crossrail progress report, but crossrail proposals have been around for decades. One of my first members' business debates—back in 1999—was on the crossrail. I am a member of the Scottish

Parliament's Glasgow crossrail cross-party group, which is trying to progress the crossrail as much as possible.

The crossrail report said that the crossrail would be open for the end of 2009. The SPT, Alistair Watson and many others have put lots of work into the project, but it was scuppered at the beginning of, or halfway through, the process. Plans exist and were costed in 2004, but we should not say that because proposals will cost £X over budget we cannot go ahead with them. It is imperative that we progress the crossrail and the Glasgow airport rail link. The Commonwealth games will take place in 2014 and we need those links.

I appeal to the minister, as I did at a meeting of the cross-party group on Glasgow crossrail. The strategic planning review is coming up, which is when the matter will be decided. Perhaps I have overstepped the mark, but I wrote to Malcolm Reid in March, pleading with him to give the project high priority. I declare an interest in the project.

The crossrail will not only link parts of Glasgow as part of an integrated transport system, but will link the rest of Scotland to the city. It will provide the people of Aberdeen and other places with a link to the airport link. At the moment, we do not have a link between Glasgow Central station and Glasgow Queen Street station, but we should not overlook the fact that there are plenty of tunnels underneath Glasgow. Most Glasgow people know about the tunnels underneath the city and about viaducts and so on that have not been considered—there are tunnels underneath the botanic gardens, for example—which can all be considered and linked up. That is not impossible.

I support the Glasgow airport rail link, but it must be complemented by the crossrail, which will open up not just the whole city but the whole of Scotland, and will enable us to have integrated transport links. If we are serious about attracting the 2014 Commonwealth games, we must ensure that that link exists. I attended a meeting that was hosted by Dennis Canavan this afternoon, at which it was mentioned that we need such transport links to ensure that our bid for the Commonwealth games in 2014 is watertight. I plead with the minister and members of every party to get behind the airport rail link, the Commonwealth games and the crossrail: with those three together, we can go forward. I plead for support for the proposal.

16:01

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, thank the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee for its thorough work. In principle, I support the airport rail link. I am satisfied that the economic-benefits case has been made and I am

aware that the project has the support of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and BAA. I have, however, concerns about the estimated positive impact in reducing road traffic—I am unconvinced by that argument. Regular M8 travellers west of Glasgow, of whom I am one, know that at peak times, which have stretched in duration in recent years, cars, buses and taxis face immovable congestion. If we add to that a projected residential development of 2,300 houses at Bishopton about five miles from the airport, the M8 is likely to become an historic exhibit of how road travel was once possible in Renfrewshire. A rail link will be the only transport service that can offer certainty in journey times to Glasgow airport.

Helpfully, the rail network to the south, east and west of Glasgow Central station suggests that other configurations of rail access to the airport via the proposed link are serious options that may fall short of the crossrail proposals, but which are active possibilities, because track exists already. They are serious goers for active consideration. That said, I have practical concerns about the proposal. I am not sure that the connectivity problem between Glasgow Queen Street station and Glasgow Central station is as significant as has been suggested—I say that as a regular commuter who uses the two stations—although an express bus shuttle from Glasgow Queen Street station to Glasgow Central station will be needed. That prerequisite assumes greater importance for people who know where the proposed dedicated platform for the rail link at Glasgow Central station is to be located: the notorious platform 11a, which is so far removed from the main concourse that it might enjoy a postal address in Kilmarnock. The express shuttle bus will need to convey passengers from Queen Street station to platform 11a but—good news—the vehicle-access structure of Glasgow Central station makes that possible.

I am aware that the rail network out of Glasgow Central that serves Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde is heavily used. The additional imposition of traffic from the proposed link will require increased track capacity, which may offer opportunities for Braehead—I understand that there is already a freight spur. If we are proceeding along the lines of further development of infrastructure and rolling stock, there are development potentials in that that should not be diminished or underestimated. The stock will also need to be tailored to accommodate the needs of luggage-transporting travellers who are bound for the airport. As a regular commuter, I know that it is not easy to store luggage in the current rolling stock. If the service is specifically for holidaymakers and other airport-bound commuters, that is a very serious problem that will need to be considered.

Comments have been made about the cost of the proposed project; there is no doubt that any amount between £170 million and £210 million is significant. That is another issue that requires serious consideration.

Some years ago, I raised with the minister's predecessor the viability of a monorail link from a newly constructed station west of Paisley Gilmour Street. The likely capital cost of that would have been very much less than £210 million. At that time, there seemed to be a commercial appetite for providing such a service, so I ask the minister today whether that option is absolutely dead. Although I think that, with one or two exceptions, all of us are very much behind the proposal, there is no doubt that the capital costs will be significant and so require serious investigation.

I am interested in projected passenger use of the rail link, as disclosed in the committee report. I am surprised and intrigued by the analysis in the report that suggests that the proportions of the total GARL patronage by trip type in 2009 are estimated to be 33 per cent air passengers, 7 per cent employees and 60 per cent non-airport-related trips. That poses a basic question: If luggage-encumbered people who are bound for the airport are seeking as direct and as simple a service as possible from a point of departure at home, they need the simplest and most congenial form of travel. Why would luggage-transporting airport-bound travellers want to fight for seats with people who are commuting between Glasgow and Paisley? I ask because a train runs between Glasgow and Paisley about every 10 or 15 minutes, so the commuters seem to be well served at the moment. That is another issue that needs to be clarified.

In principle, the development offers an exciting prospect for Glasgow and it certainly offers an exciting prospect for the west of Scotland, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, and potentially for Ayrshire. I therefore support the proposal.

16:07

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** This afternoon's debate has been quite well informed, although for some folk it might not have been the sexiest of subjects. However, the information that we have received from many individuals has added to the flavour of the debate.

Several practical problems have been raised. If each one of us was asked whether we would start the integration of Scotland's public transport with the GARL proposals, we might say that we would not. However, we are not being presented with that choice, but are being asked whether we support the bill; there can be no other answer than that we do. The GARL is an essential link that is

long overdue. There should be a link for Edinburgh airport as well, so we have to support the motion that is before us today.

Perhaps the minister is a bit restricted in what he can and cannot say today, but everyone has asked for a commitment to the Glasgow crossrail proposals. Everyone is saying to the minister that they believe that we should commit that amount of public money to the airport rail link, but to do it without a commitment to the crossrail scheme will not produce the same value for that public money. That is why we hope that when the minister is summing up, he will give us a much stronger commitment to the Glasgow crossrail.

Fair play to Brian Monteith; he wants to raise some doubts, which is what chamber debates are all about. However, he talked about costs and the ability to show value for money. I cannot take part in this debate without referring to one of the single biggest cases of rail robbery ever: the privatisation of rail services in 1993. Since that piece of Tory architecture was put in place, £15 million of public money every week—or £800 million every year and £6.4 billion since privatisation—has been poured into railway services and siphoned out into the pockets of private contractors and dividend holders. The sooner we return to publicly owned railway services the better, because that will ensure that we get full value from those hundreds of millions of pounds.

Although the promoter's policy memorandum contains a few paragraphs on St James playing fields and although the convener mentioned the commitment to proposals on that issue, I hope that the matter will receive more detailed consideration during the bill's passage. Some people in the communities around Paisley and Renfrew who regularly use those football pitches might not care about the railway link; however, they will certainly care about losing up to half the pitches during the link's construction and will want those facilities not just to be reinstated but to be upgraded for the many youngsters who use them. That was certainly the major point that I stressed in my one-to-one meetings with Alistair Watson on the proposal. To be fair, Councillor Watson accepted that it is a big issue; in fact, he recalled that it was the single biggest issue that had been raised during public consultation in the Paisley area. I repeat that we must ensure that we take the opportunity of this major construction project not just to reinstate but to improve the facilities.

We must also bear in mind that a regular bus service already runs from Buchanan Street bus station to Glasgow airport. An open return on that service, which it is claimed takes 25 minutes—I imagine that that depends on traffic at peak times—costs £5. I asked the minister earlier about fares because if we really want to tempt people off

the road and on to this service not only must there be integration and connectivity, but we must ensure that fares are right and are properly subsidised. By doing that, we will ensure that the service will be used not only by people who can afford it at the moment. Annabel Goldie made the important point that the carriages on the route should be not only environmentally friendly and sustainable but spacious. That practical consideration must be taken on board; after all, most of the people whom we hope will use the service will probably be carrying one or two suitcases.

The promoter also projects a 2 per cent reduction in road use. Some members have said that that is not very much, but I point out that in 2004, when passenger numbers were last recorded, 8.5 million passengers used Glasgow airport. As Charlie Gordon said, the estimates of future passenger numbers range from the conservative civil service estimate of 15 million to the operators' estimate of 30 million. Given those estimates of growth in airport usage, a 2 per cent reduction in road usage should not be scoffed at, particularly as such usage is increasing by 4 and 5 per cent each year. If we can achieve a 2 per cent reduction, that would be positive and should be welcomed.

I support the proposal, with conditions attached, including the conditions that community facilities must be improved and that fares must be affordable to all. I also appeal to the minister to use the massive public investment as an argument for bringing the whole rail network back to where it belongs—in public ownership—so that we do not simply pour money into the pockets of the privateers who will manage the project. Such projects should be managed in-house as part of the public sector.

16:15

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Unlike the committee convener, who was of course wholly impartial, I come to the debate with a perspective from North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire, and I my approach to the bill is to ask how much it will contribute to the economic development of Ayrshire.

I noted with interest the additional economic information that was provided to the committee by consultants who were engaged by the promoters and which detailed the benefits to Ayrshire and Inverclyde of the rail link to Glasgow airport. The greatest benefit, of course, will be derived by the members of the public who will take up the option of travelling to the airport by train, although non-airport rail passengers will benefit significantly from the increased reliability and frequency of train services that will follow from increasing the line capacity between Glasgow Central and Paisley.

Travelling by rail between Ayr and Glasgow is often a frustrating experience, in which overcrowded trains and a limited timetable put off many people who would prefer to travel to work by train. I have no doubt that improvement of the rail infrastructure will encourage the modal shift from road to rail that is often aspired to but is little realised, although it is ironic that the main shift in this case is likely to occur among non-airport passengers. That emphasises the point that the investment that is proposed for increasing line capacity is badly needed, whether or not the case for the airport link stacks up.

Improvement of rail services to Ayrshire will also contribute to social inclusion and regeneration objectives by improving access to jobs, education and training opportunities in areas of Ayrshire—notably the Irvine bay area—that are struggling with higher than average levels of long-term unemployment and low skill levels. The proposed new pathfinder urban regeneration company for the area will be facilitated by the investment that we are discussing today.

I was interested in the evidence that was provided by the manager of the Ayrshire joint structure plan, who pointed out that an ever-increasing number of Ayrshire residents are travelling to work in Glasgow, pushed by the lack of local jobs but also pulled by job opportunities in the city, to which Charlie Gordon and other members have alluded. All the evidence suggests that those labour market trends will continue.

In addition, the prospect of the further growth of Prestwick airport and of the rail-passenger traffic that that generates—about 20 per cent of total airport customers—also points to the need to improve the capacity of the Ayr to Glasgow line. I conclude, therefore, that the case for investment in that line is substantially proved from an Ayrshire perspective. That investment would be welcomed, but only as a first step—there will still be capacity issues to resolve south of Paisley and at Glasgow Central.

Whether the case for the rail link to Glasgow airport stands up is an altogether different question. In that regard, the evidence from the operators of Prestwick airport was particularly interesting. Their view is that airport users' attraction to such a rail link is limited. People like point-to-point connectivity, but rail generally does not offer that, particularly in the Glasgow context, with the missing links between Glasgow Central and Queen Street stations. Bus services are much more flexible: they wait for delayed flights, whereas trains do not. They also operate early in the morning and late at night, when trains do not: Glasgow Central station closes at 12 o'clock at night.

If Sandra White will forgive me, I will remain unconvinced about the rail link to Glasgow

Abbotsinch and will support it only as a mechanism to get more investment into the Glasgow to Ayr rail line. The promoter has more work to do to justify the view that that project represents value for money.

16:20

**Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):** I am delighted to be back in Parliament after several months on maternity leave. In that vein, I add my congratulations to Michael Matheson on becoming a father to James: I hope that he enjoys parenthood as much as I do.

I thank the committee for its report, which I read last week. I found it to be seriously detailed and challenging scrutiny—it is exactly the sort of work that was envisaged by Parliament's promoters a number of years ago.

During my absence over recent months, when I have been reduced to watching daytime television so that I might understand the deliberations of Parliament, I have been struck by how much our reputation as politicians comes down to the decisions that we make. The decision today is whether we support in principle the case for a rail link to Glasgow airport. The case for the rail link is that strengthening of Glasgow airport's competitive advantage is fundamental to ensuring the economic strength of the whole of the west of Scotland. That is the essential case for the bill. In addition, a host of other economic benefits will flow to Renfrewshire and to Scotland: 650 new jobs will be created in Renfrewshire in the next 10 years, and an additional 700 jobs will be created in Paisley town centre when the line starts to operate. Benefits will include extra office space, additional visitor expenditure and extra trains to Glasgow.

I realise that some members are sceptical about such forecasts, but any legislature anywhere in the world that is debating an infrastructure project must decide whether the forecasts that have been put before it are an adequate basis on which to proceed. I urge those who have anxieties about whether the estimates that the promoter has put before us are overly optimistic to consider—as the minister said near the beginning of the debate—that patronage on the Larkhall to Milngavie line is 30 per cent up on the same promoter's original projections.

The purpose of parliamentary debate—we will come to the decision later—is to draw out the differences of opinion, so I will dwell a little while on the differences that we have heard. Mr Ewing told us that the SNP now favours the scheme; we welcome his conversion, albeit that it is somewhat late. Sandra White was positively effusive, so I have to ask that an SNP member—if not Sandra,

then whoever will sum up for the SNP—explain why the SNP's Scottish Parliament candidates in Renfrewshire describe the link as

“the wrong route, in the wrong place and at the wrong price.”

Sandra White claimed that Glasgow people are not parochial, but the charge of being parochial is the one that we must level against the SNP's representatives who have, week in and week out, stirred up local opposition and now turn their backs on 700 local jobs.

**Ms White:** I welcome Wendy Alexander back. Her babies are beautiful; I am sure that she concurs with that.

Wendy Alexander said near the beginning of her speech that we are here to agree in principle on a rail link. Every member who has spoken from every party has said the same. Although my comrades in Renfrewshire agree in principle with the rail link, they have concerns about the scheme. That is all there is to it.

**Ms Alexander:** I look forward to hearing an in-principle agreement from the people who said yesterday that their objection is to the whole bill. I could go on, but I will leave it there.

All parties have their dissidents. The Tories have, of course, already jettisoned Brian Monteith, their dissident. I can say only that his argument seems to take on a slightly different flavour depending on whether he looks towards the Clyde or the Forth. As Charlie Gordon said in his speech, Brian Monteith told us in *The Herald* this morning that the problem is that the scheme is “not ambitious enough”. However, I drove along the M8 to Parliament today to find in the amendment that he lodged that the problem is that he

“does not agree to the general principles of the ... Bill”

at all. One could do a little bit better by discussing the general principles in the same terms regardless of whether one looks towards the Forth or towards the Clyde.

The Greens constantly berate us, sometimes with good cause and good reason, for the slow progress that is made on infrastructure projects and for the pace at which they proceed, but to insist that we halt the development of the Glasgow airport rail link and await another project's development is probably not the way forward.

**Patrick Harvie:** I clarify that I did not call for a halt but suggested that the crossrail scheme ought to be the priority.

**Ms Alexander:** There are dangers in using the word “priority”, but I will leave it there.

I will say a word about what is happening in Paisley. The racecourse, as it is known, is the site

in St James park playing fields for 22 football pitches, although only 20 are laid out. I record my gratitude for the combined efforts of local footballers, Renfrewshire council's persistence and the good will on the promoter's part: those efforts mean that, once the link is complete, 20 pitches will be provided on the current site with an additional two pitches at Ferguslie. The crucial point is that all those pitches will be upgraded to league standard and the existing pavilion will be replaced by new and modern facilities that will accommodate 40 teams and local officials. That has been widely welcomed in my part of the world, so it is vital that a legal agreement with Renfrewshire Council be reached quickly on those matters.

As we move on to the consideration stage, I urge the reporter to remain mindful of local concerns about the link's impact. Members from several parties made important comments about the crossrail project's importance; I do not want to add to those, but I emphasise the importance of upgrading Paisley Gilmour Street station as part of the project. Also, more work is required to relocate and compensate businesses that will be displaced or disrupted. Improved consultation of local residents is also needed on issues such as mitigation of the scheme's visual impact. In that regard, I welcome the community liaison groups as a forum for working with the communities that will be affected. The consultation must be real and effective.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, our choice is to proceed with the project or not to proceed. Calls to delay it after so many years of waiting smack of underlying opposition to it. The Glasgow airport rail link is a visionary development. It will strengthen the west of Scotland's physical infrastructure and will bring direct economic benefits to Glasgow and the whole west of Scotland metropolitan area. It deserves Parliament's support today.

16:28

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate Wendy Alexander. Having recently become a father, I am sure that we can share stories of sleep deprivation.

Like other members, I welcome the committee's report, which interrogates carefully a number of challenges that the project faces. I use the word “challenges” because that is what we have described all the transport projects that the Parliament has considered as being, none of which has been a seamless project without challenges.

A number of members have made constructive points about how to progress the Glasgow airport

rail link. Brian Monteith made a number of reasonable points about patronage, but—although I strongly agree with what Tommy Sheridan said about it—I feel that concerns about patronage will be dealt with through the effective promotion of the link. The pricing scheme and the timetabling will also be important. I share other members' concerns that trains on the route will stop at 11.45 pm. We will have to consider how the rail link timetable integrates with the operating times of Glasgow airport. Before we reach the next stages of the bill, I hope that the promoter will consider further evidence.

The cost of the project is important and we should ensure that the issues arising are given objective scrutiny. We had to face cost issues when this Parliament building was being built, and there is no reason why the rail link project should not be subjected to the same kind of scrutiny.

Charlie Gordon made a passionate and robust speech. When we first came to this Parliament, we thought that we could change the world. I still believe that we can, and I believe that my constituents would expect no less of me than that I would still think that. I would argue that the crossrail scheme would change the world and would change the opportunities for the world to visit Glasgow airport and then many parts of Scotland. I welcomed Charlie Gordon's support for transport projects when he was the leader of Glasgow City Council. I will not say that he wanted to rule the world when he was leader, but I will say that he played a positive role. As Sandra White said, there was a very constructive campaigning partnership with the *Evening Times*. The campaign for the Glasgow airport link had to be constructive and had to present a robust case. I think that we made that case.

Connectivity has been mentioned throughout the debate. The committee convener made constructive points about it, and Brian Monteith—to be fair to him—has made such points consistently, as can be seen from the *Official Report*. However, I call on Brian and on all members to join the campaign for crossrail in Glasgow. It is an ambitious campaign to ensure that the Glasgow airport link is a success.

It has been suggested that we have not considered the economic issues relating to Edinburgh airport, but Edinburgh airport will face similar challenges if the Glasgow airport link is a success. If the Glasgow airport link and Glasgow crossrail are successful, Edinburgh airport will have to take competition with Glasgow airport into consideration.

The committee has considered the arguments constructively. Bill Butler raised a number of serious issues and he has ensured that the details of the crossrail project have been laid out. The

cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on Glasgow crossrail will continue to campaign on the project.

**Mr Monteith:** I want to present some information that was made available to the committee but is not in the body of the committee's report. Falkirk, West Lothian, Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian, Scottish Borders, Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Perth and Kinross, Dundee, Angus and Aberdeen—those towns, cities and regions provide some 40 per cent of the passengers who fly in and out of Glasgow airport. That is a tremendous achievement for Glasgow airport, but I would be seriously worried about the percentage staying as high once Edinburgh airport gets its connectivity. I would be seriously worried—and I think that Paul Martin might be worried—that, without crossrail, the hoped-for passenger figures will not be achieved.

**Paul Martin:** Estimates are always easily questioned. If my constituents afford me the opportunity, I will be happy to stand in this chamber in 2030 and scrutinise the figures that Brian Monteith refers to. Scrutiny is an important part of the process, and the committee and the Parliament will have to do that at the consideration stage and the final stage.

I spoke earlier about the effective promotion of the route. Stewart Maxwell spoke about people in East Kilbride and elsewhere, and we will have to provide them with serious alternatives. If we promote the route effectively and consider the pricing scheme in the constructive way that Tommy Sheridan set out, people will choose to travel by rail. Let us remember one point. There is a perception that everyone who arrives at Glasgow airport has a truckload of suitcases with them, but many people who travel in business class do not have the suitcases to which we continually refer.

The bill is to be commended. I welcome the work that the committee has done and the constructive comments that have been made. The promoter will be able to take up the issues that have been raised to ensure that we deliver a Glasgow airport rail link alongside a crossrail link.

16:35

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** I thank Margaret Jamieson and her colleagues on the committee for producing a thorough and well-constructed report, in which they point out both the positive aspects of the project and, rightly, the difficulties that could arise. It has been a largely consensual debate, with Brian Monteith sounding the only discordant note. In fairness, he was correct to indicate the difficulties that might arise.



One point is clear—when we talk about integrated transport arrangements, we would not wish to be in the current position. It is easy to have 20:20 vision in hindsight, but in many respects the integration of our transport system has been inadequate. Governments of both complexions must take some responsibility for that. At the same time, it is necessary to underline the point that things have changed. What applied to the economy of Glasgow and the west of Scotland 40 or 50 years ago, when there were heavy engineering industries, no longer applies. Glasgow and the other west of Scotland towns have had to look in other directions to earn their living. For example, the conference industry in Glasgow brings in £112 million a year and is likely to grow significantly in the next few years. That makes it all the more important for us to examine how we can make the arrival of people at conferences much more agreeable than it is today.

We must consider tourism. All of us want to attract tourism to Scotland and one of the major inhibitors is the fact that we are where we are and that Glasgow airport and other Scottish airports cannot become hubs. However, Glasgow airport could become a mini-hub for north Atlantic flights. One thing that Americans will not tolerate is hassle in getting to and from their destination. The proposal would undoubtedly help in that respect.

I do not mean to suggest that there are not difficult issues ahead. One of the issues that we need to consider is the vital importance for the city of Glasgow and Scotland generally of obtaining the 2014 Commonwealth games. If we are successful, many thousands of people will come into Glasgow airport for the occasion. We must ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place. An important selling point in obtaining the event would be for us to be able to say that the rail link will be in place by then.

There are difficulties with the proposal. Although it is not the most expensive of capital projects, the amount involved is hardly a mere bagatelle. We must ensure that this public sector project is kept under reasonable control. I say that standing in this chamber. Unfortunately, I am not particularly encouraged by what has happened so far. The minister was perhaps a little disingenuous in what he said earlier about the costings and how they have increased. If we had got off the mark a little faster, there would not have been the additional costs that are now expected. I accept the point that the minister quite properly made that 2004 prices are not 2006 prices, but the Executive's failure to get a move on and to get the project under way has led to a haemorrhaging of public funding. Obviously, in the future, the Conservatives will be looking to ensure that that does not happen.

The committee took pains to point out the contradictory nature of the evidence that it heard. That said, there seems to be a fair consistency in the evidence on the inevitability of an increase in air traffic, although the estimates vary. Surely what cannot be gainsaid is that Glasgow airport will attract many more passengers in the years ahead. At a recent presentation that it made to Glasgow and west of Scotland MSPs, BAA indicated the significant growth in activity at the airport over the next 12 to 15 months. For example, one Virgin flight, which will use a Boeing 747-400 on its Glasgow to Florida service, is likely to carry about 20,000 people a year. We were also told that other routes are on stream. The future looks promising, but it will be promising only if the GARL project is afoot. We need to make it clear that the existing arrangements are far from satisfactory.

As a supporter of crossrail, I recognise the important but not necessarily vital part that it plays in the GARL equation. Crossrail will not do terribly much for passengers who struggle to get from Queen Street station to Central station with four cases and two children in tow. As Annabel Goldie suggested, a bus link should be provided to enable people in those circumstances to travel as quickly as possible from one station to the other. [*Interruption.*] From what the minister appears to be saying, I note that he concedes the point.

**Tavish Scott:** No, I was saying that there is a bus link between the two stations, which is free.

**Bill Aitken:** I am aware of that. Indeed, as the minister may remember, at one point I found myself on crutches and used the service. The fact of the matter is that if platform 11a, which is a particularly remote platform, is to be used for the service at Central station, the bus will have to go direct to the side of the train.

The debate has been reasonably constructive, with only one dissenter, and I am certain that GARL will achieve the support of the chamber at decision time. Once again, I flag up the fact that the project receives our support with the caveat that costs must be monitored and controlled.

16:42

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Several members referred to the fact that we are not starting off with a blank sheet of paper—or, indeed, a blank map of Scotland. As Donald Gorrie said, if that were the case, we might not have an airport to the west of Glasgow and another one to the west of Edinburgh. It might also mean that Glasgow would not have two stations. That is a reduction on the four that Victorian competition left us with, albeit that the geography of the city has something to do with us still having two and not one station. We are where we are; we

cannot wish away those facts or pretend that they do not exist. That said, they limit the options that we can come up with.

Against that background, we have airports that are difficult to access other than by road or from the nearest metropolis. The road systems near all our major airports are increasingly congested, with perhaps the exception of Glasgow Prestwick—although even there we have a problem at rush hour. For non-car users to get to any central airport is very difficult; indeed, even for car users it is becoming difficult.

At the same time, the norm for comparable countries that are competing with us for industry and tourism is fast, modern public transport links to their airports—whether that is by train, rapid transport system or tram. We have a problem in that respect and it needs to be addressed. Starting from that premise, we cannot continue to keep postponing decisions, either on this project or the Edinburgh airport rail link, simply because the solution that we come up with is not ideal. As the Earl of Home once remarked about a scheme for devolution in Scotland, we cannot wait until such time as something better comes along; if we were to do so, we would never do anything. Every day that goes past, the roads to the airport get more and more congested, which is bad for business—as the minister said—bad for connectivity, bad for tourism and bad for potential users of the airport.

Legislation is needed before we can implement the rail, light rail and tram projects that we want. The procedure exposes schemes to far greater scrutiny than equivalent road schemes receive. Similarly, much expenditure on rail or tram schemes is subject to treatment that is entirely different from that to which expenditure in relation to road use is subject. Anyone who wants to run a bus or car need only buy one, because the Government conveniently provides the roads on which they can drive, whereas if First ScotRail wants to run a train, it must jump through hoops at the Treasury or in Scotland to secure the track on which the train can run.

Our decision on GARL or another rail link is not a decision between having a link and having nothing. There are problems with GARL, but if the scheme is rejected, alternatives will take its place. For example, more cars and buses will go to the airport and there will be more congestion and pollution on the M8 and around Glasgow—that will happen without any committee reports, debates, parliamentary decisions or Scottish transport appraisal guidance approval. GARL is not the perfect scheme, but if we wait for the perfect scheme, we will wait for ever. Perhaps that is what some people want us to do.

GARL is imperfect, for reasons that members have described. It has been stressed that other

links are needed if the maximum benefit is to be delivered. It is clear that Glasgow crossrail would bring benefits, but—this brings me back to my point about the existing infrastructure—crossrail would not bring unalloyed benefits or come without significant problems. If long-distance services used crossrail, there would be implications for the level of service at Queen Street station. There would be capacity problems if High Street became a terminal. There would be capacity problems in Glasgow Central station, because trains that used the crossrail link to reach the airport would have to go in and out of the station—it might seem an obvious point, but two movements in and out of a station that is already congested would be needed just to get the train to the airport. The geography of the area is such that there is no perfect solution.

Members have talked about the problem of changing stations at Paisley Gilmour Street station, which would be significant for people from North and South Ayrshire and the south-west. Members were also concerned that passengers would need to get to the airport at times when trains do not run. However, it is not a given that Glasgow Central station must close at a certain hour; surely the station should close when the Scottish Executive decides that it should close, in the context of its overall transport policy. Similarly, the Executive should decide when trains will run.

Brian Monteith, in particular, asked about the impact of the proposed Edinburgh airport rail link. However, given the rate at which air travel is projected to increase—unless we start to tax it severely, as one member in the chamber might like us to do—I suspect that there will be more than enough traffic to go round our available airports.

Despite the project's name, GARL is about not just Glasgow airport but capacity on the main line from Ayrshire into Glasgow Central station. How that capacity is used will depend on demand, but it is clear that GARL would bring significant benefits. The link would provide more trains for non-airport passengers, although there would be a difficult balance to strike between the type of rolling stock that is needed for an intensive commuter route and the type that is needed for airport passengers. Annabel Goldie alluded to that problem.

However, the problems that I identified are not insuperable. We cannot postpone our decision because a better scheme might turn up at some point—that is not likely. The GARL scheme has warts, but we should get on with it.

16:49

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** When I became a member of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee, little did I think

that it would bring unpredicted benefits. However, thanks to the bill, I can now say that I have been in Paisley more often in the past six weeks than I had been there in the previous 60 years.

Like other members of the committee, I thank the support team that helped to get the bill to this stage. Time was not on the committee's side, yet papers were turned around quickly and efficiently by the support staff. I also thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee. They did so with commitment and interest. Sadly, that could not be said of some public bodies, which failed to respond to the invitation. Despite that, the committee correctly discharged its duties in producing a report that, after giving due consideration to the objections, recommends that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

The three main elements of the bill required the committee to determine whether the documents supporting the application were satisfactory, which we did; to ensure that the promoter did not contravene or conflict with existing law, which we checked; and to consider initially the thrust of the objections to the proposal, which was the most difficult of the committee's functions. Although, as the convener said, the committee dismissed a number of objections, I am pleased that all objections to specific provisions in the bill will be dealt with in detail at the next stage.

Physically, the proposed rail link runs from Glasgow Central station through to Paisley Gilmour Street station and then to Glasgow airport. In doing so, it runs through two of the busiest stations in Scotland. It will service directly one of the busiest airports in Scotland and will aid access to another of the main points of international connection. As other members have remarked, more than 8 million people currently pass through Glasgow airport every year and that figure is expected to rise steeply. As other members have also remarked, the private operator of the airport reckons that, by 2030, the figure will rise to 24 million. The promoter reckons that the rail link will provide a vital role in coping with the extra traffic.

As the convener of the committee and everyone else who has taken part in the debate have remarked, the business case for GARL would be further strengthened if there was a wider connection to the transport network. Figures provided by the promoter show that there is an economic case for the rail link as it is, but traveller numbers would increase with better linkages. Many members have pointed to the fact that the creation of a cross-Glasgow rail link would bring major economic advantages by opening up the project to many travellers and airport workers who live to the east and north of Glasgow. As was found out on a committee fact-finding trip to

Manchester, travellers want their trips to be as convenient as possible. Neither luggage nor children lend themselves easily to shifts in transport systems when going on holiday.

Although there is no definite commitment to a cross-Glasgow link so far, the minister acknowledges that

"there is a strong argument on paper for the Glasgow crossrail."—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 22 May 2006; c 205.]

However, for the moment, let us not amend the bill into the Glasgow airport rail link and Glasgow crossrail bill. The near unanimity on the crossrail project should ensure that everyone puts it in their manifesto for next year.

The connection south between GARL and routes to the west of Paisley was also of concern to the committee, which has expressed the view that links with Inverclyde and—I was originally going to say Ayrshire, but I will change that—parts of Ayrshire would benefit the wider community. The convener was correct to underline the economic benefits to be gained from the scheme. Prediction is not an exact science, so we must be content with the estimates of increased employment and income generation. I believe that those are understated, but the main point is that there will be a major economic spin-off from the project.

Bill Butler rightly pointed to GARL playing an integral and important role in the 2014 Commonwealth games bid. He and Charlie Gordon also commented on the current role of Glasgow as an important hub in the international conference circuit.

The other main benefit of the airport rail link is that it should move traffic from the congested road system in the area, which is a Scottish Executive priority. I congratulate Annabel Goldie on her support, albeit enforced, for the rail system.

It is fair to say that the committee was disappointed that the number of cars and taxis would be reduced by only 2 per cent, but members should note that that is only one benefit of the project and that 2 per cent on one of the busiest stretches of motorway in Scotland can be significant.

I congratulate Patrick Harvie on dancing on the head of a pin in supporting the rail link. That support, linked with the Greens' opposition to air travel, means that we will find the Greens milling about the departure lounge in the airport unsure of what to do next.

Although I understand the concern about the crossing of the St James football pitches, the efforts of the promoter should result in better drained pitches and improved changing facilities.

In welcoming double-mum Alexander back to the Parliament, I echo her call for the proposed improvements to be pinned down legally. More detailed evidence will be taken on St James park at consideration stage.

The overall cost of the project will be more firmly determined at the next stage, but to ensure credibility with the public, we must provide more robust and accurate costing of this major construction scheme.

The committee was strongly of the view that although there should be a wider economic benefit to Scotland from the scheme, one of the main beneficiaries would be the private owners of Glasgow airport. The current takeover turmoil affecting BAA should not obscure the fact that whoever operates the airport must acknowledge the major advantages arising from the project. I hope that the Scottish Executive will be robust in future discussions with the airport operator about the financial benefits of the project and that the minister will use the Gatwick example to strengthen his argument.

Part of the committee's remit was to consider other options, to which one of our meetings was devoted. There is no doubt that the extension of the heavy rail line, as proposed, would cause major disruption and incur considerable cost. However, the evidence that we received on the light rail alternative just did not stand up.

I turn to Brian Monteith's contribution. I note that he agrees with 203 of the 206 paragraphs in the committee's report. We differ on the three to which he objects. The majority of us took the constructive approach of highlighting issues to the minister, so that they can be addressed. Brian Monteith, on the other hand, seemed to want to ditch the bill and the scheme. I could be picky and observe that he agrees with paragraph 146, which, in essence, agrees that crossrail is important and accepts that work has to begin somewhere.

By the time many passengers who arrive on flights early in the morning clear customs and collect their luggage, GARL trains might well be running. I mention that, because Brian Monteith referred to early morning flights arriving before those trains would be operating.

I am happy to support the motion, which will see the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill move down the line.

## Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill: Financial Resolution

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of a financial resolution. I ask Tavish Scott to move motion S2M-4574, on the financial resolution in respect of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, agrees to any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9A.14.3(b)(ii) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.—[*Tavish Scott.*]

## Business Motions

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4587, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 22 June 2006—

after,

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert,

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Legislative Programme

and after,

2.55 pm Continuation of Stage 3 Proceedings: Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Bill

delete,

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Legislative Programme—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4588, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 28 June 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: End-Year Flexibility

*followed by* Executive Debate: Race Equality

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 29 June 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Executive Debate: International Development/Malawi

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm

Themed Question Time—  
Health and Community Care;  
Environment and Rural Development

2.55 pm

Stage 1 Debate: Tourist Boards  
(Scotland) Bill

*followed by*

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

*followed by*

Members' Business—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motions S2M-4578 to S2M-4580, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft International Criminal Court (Immunities and Privileges) (No. 1) Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft International Criminal Court (Immunities and Privileges) (No. 2) Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Consequential Amendments) (Scotland) Order 2006 be approved.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-4550, in the name of Margaret Jamieson, that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, and that the bill should proceed as a private bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**AGAINST**

Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 110, Against 1, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S2M-4574, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the financial resolution in respect of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, agrees to any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9A.14.3(b)(ii) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motions S2M-4578 to S2M-4580, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft International Criminal Court (Immunities and Privileges) (No. 1) Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft International Criminal Court (Immunities and Privileges) (No. 2) Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Consequential Amendments) (Scotland) Order 2006 be approved.

## Highland Transport Links

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-4515, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on main road and rail transport links to the Highlands. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament believes that the main trunk roads connections to the Highlands of Scotland, namely the A9 from Inverness to Perth, the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen and the A82 from Inverness to Glasgow, should be the subject of major improvements, to be carried out in accordance with a long-term transport projects plan; believes that the rail links to Inverness are inadequate and should be improved; considers that a national consensus should be established to agree these objectives, and, in the case of the A96 and the A9, believes that the ultimate objective should be to dual these trunk routes.

17:05

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I thank all members who supported the motion and those who have stayed on for the debate.

Last week, we supported the enabling bill for a Borders railway. This week, I put the case for improved transport links for the Highlands. There are three main trunk roads that connect the Highlands to the rest of Scotland: the A82, which serves the west Highlands from Glasgow to Inverness; the A9, which runs up Scotland's spine; and the A96, from Inverness to Aberdeen. Rail links connect Inverness to Perth and Inverness to Aberdeen. They are largely single track, like their sibling mode of transport, the roads.

The motion calls for major improvements to both road and rail links and for a national consensus to agree those broad objectives. It calls, as an ultimate objective, for the upgrading of the two busiest trunk roads—the A9 and the A96—to dual carriageway status from Perth to Inverness and Inverness to Aberdeen. The objective of this debate is to construct a national consensus that the transport links that serve the north of Scotland are inadequate and that major improvements are required. In my view, that consensus already exists among the people. During the past seven years, no issue has been raised with me more frequently by my constituents than the issue of transport links. It is the people's priority, but it is not, apparently, a priority for the Scottish Executive. That is a democratic deficit that I wish to see brought to an end.

It is, sadly, a matter of record that, during the past seven years, there has been no major improvement to any of the three main trunk roads that connect the north of Scotland to the rest of the

country in the south. New junctions have been promised, and an upgrade to the junction at Ballinluig was announced today—we welcome that. There have been several new roundabouts on the A96 and some new two-plus-one sections, but there have been no major improvements to those roads in the past seven years, nor has there been any major improvement to the northern rail links in that time.

The Scottish Executive has not ordered any major improvement to those transport links as part of its strategic projects plan. There have been minor projects and, of course, those are welcome, but although Inverness is Scotland's fastest growing city, it is the only city in Scotland that lacks dual road or rail links. One can understand why many of the citizens of Inverness feel that we have not been invited to the devolution ball. Inverness is a Cinderella city.

The national consensus that I believe exists among those whom we seek to represent also includes fulsome support from business organisations. The Inverness Chamber of Commerce commented just today:

"Currently, we are a city without inter-city connections."

There is also support from Fort William Chamber of Commerce as well as from the Federation of Small Businesses, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, Councillor Charles King and the Highlands and Islands strategic transport partnership. Highlands and Islands Enterprise's development network says that the motion is consistent with its long-term ambitions for the Highlands. The consensus exists with the people and with those who represent businesses in the north of Scotland.

Why should the roads be dualled? First, for the economy, as that would create and sustain jobs and create opportunities. We send our high-quality fruit produce, our national drink and many other products to the south. They embark on a long journey, often to far-flung parts of the world. The lack of dual carriageways causes long delays and platooning behind lorries.

Secondly, the roads should be dualled on the ground of road safety. The three main trunk roads in the Highlands are the top three in the Freight Transport Association's list of the worst trunk roads in Scotland. Earlier this month, in a poll conducted by the rural community gateway, the three roads were voted, by a long way, the worst rural roads in Scotland.

The A9's record on fatalities is among the worst in Scotland. On that road between 2000 and 2004, 84 people died in accidents and 1,111 accidents occurred. Scarcely a week goes by without news of another tragic accident. I know that members have been in accidents on that road and I had a



friend who died on the road. I am sure that many others can tell a similar tale.

The A9 is particularly unforgiving of driver error. Responsibility always rests with the driver. However, driver error is almost encouraged when the road alternates from single carriageway to dual carriageway and now to a two-plus-one section before going back to a single carriageway. No method such as improved signage can tackle the confusion that that creates.

The third reason to dual the roads is to do so for the people. I am absolutely convinced that the people whom I represent want better roads and better railway services. They are fed up with the experience of three or four hours' drive to the central belt. That is frustrating, a waste of time, uncomfortable and irritating. People have had enough. Let us put the stakeholders to one side and respect the people's wishes.

I have not called for a timescale in the motion. The work that I advocate is part of a long-term plan and would certainly take a couple of decades. For example, the cost of upgrading the A9 is £600 million and that work must be spread over a few years. The aim of the debate is to agree the objective that major improvements are required. Let us take the politics out of transport. That is done in the USA, where people can look up a plan to improve roads in 2015 or 2016. Once the objectives are agreed, politics falls by the wayside.

If the motion is acted on, lives will be improved and some lives will be saved. The economy will benefit, people will gain and opportunities will be created. If this relatively new institution acts on the national consensus that I outlined, we will create a clear sense that the Scottish Parliament is a Parliament for the whole of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A considerable number of back benchers wish to speak, so speeches will be of three minutes.

17:12

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing the debate. I have no doubt that improvements to the transport infrastructure in the Highlands—those that are happening and those for the future—are of the utmost necessity. In general, the motion addresses key concerns of the Highland communities, but I hesitated to support it in its entirety.

My constituent, Mr Iain Bannerman of Bannerman Seafoods of Tain, who is known to some members, put the situation simply to me when he said that investment in the road infrastructure would be

“one of the single biggest factors to boost economic growth in the Highlands”.

He agrees that the A9 must be concentrated on. I welcome what is going on at the Ord of Caithness and on other parts of the A9 to the north of Fergus Ewing's constituency, but there is no doubt that we must continue to invest as the years go by.

From a safety perspective, it is imperative that that busy trunk road can cope with the volume of traffic, particularly heavy road vehicles, that it supports. I was reminded today that the speed limit for lorries and haulage trucks on the single carriageway is 40mph, which is 20mph below the speed limit for cars; the limit goes up to 50mph on the dual carriageway. All of us know that, unfortunately, many vehicles travel at well over that limit. In many ways, increasing the speed limit to that of a dual carriageway would mean that one travelled somewhat more safely. Upgrading that busy road would allow the speed limit to be increased and would benefit local transport companies while, I believe, significantly reducing the accident risk, to which Fergus Ewing referred.

It will be no surprise to Fergus Ewing that I say that improvements are needed not solely on the stretch of road between Inverness and Perth. Commuters and business interests in the far north must be considered and the minister will be aware of several proposed improvements for them. Mr Iain Bannerman suggested to me that a crawler lane in the Black Isle on the stretch that heads south from Dingwall to Inverness would be helpful. People who are acquainted with that road will know that there can be hold-ups on it. To reduce the risk of accidents, such a lane would be a welcome addition.

The minister is aware of my calls for a flyover at Berriedale and I look forward to meeting him and others in the summer to discuss that proposal, which has the support of the association of Caithness community councils.

I wish that I could have heard somewhat more from Fergus Ewing about what he means by specific rail improvements, although we can discuss that matter later. Investment in our rail infrastructure would be wonderful, but I think that highlanders would agree that increasing the number of trains that serve the area that I represent, for example, could be unwarranted, given the passenger numbers that the network serves. I have no doubt that Mr Gibson will have more to say about that matter, but there is a chicken-and-egg situation. Perhaps the market for rail services should be considered in parallel with investment.

Finally, I give notice to the minister that I am going to lodge detailed questions on rail rolling stock, which Mr Mike Lunan, whom Rob Gibson and I know, has provided to me. The questions are well informed and I hope that they will progress the thinking of the Parliament and the Executive.

Again, I congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing the debate and look forward to hearing what other members have to say.

17:15

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):**

We require better main road and rail transport links to and from the Highlands that do not begin and end at Inverness. People travel to the capital of the Highlands from all points of the compass, so it is important that the whole of the north can benefit from a transport infrastructure revamp and that remote and rural areas do not lose out. Jamie Stone argued for some proposals, which Fergus Ewing also alluded to.

Cars are needed most in our scattered communities, and the development of local sources of biofuel and bio-ethanol should in the future beat fuel hikes and allow people to continue to use cars. However, to achieve the modal shift in transport use that is part of the Government-agreed Highland Council strategic plan, we need a hugely improved rail network that can accommodate increased volumes of freight and passengers and a vastly improved and integrated road public transport system that runs on better planned roads. That means that there should be double rail tracks from Perth to Inverness, the roof of the Killiecrankie tunnel should be heightened to take freight containers, the Aberdeen to Inverness line, which is shorter than the road, should be speeded up and money should be spent on shortening the far north rail line by building the Dornoch rail link. It also means that we should get all supermarket lorries off strategic road routes in order to free up space on them, which could be done almost immediately through a concerted effort by the minister, councils and rail freight firms. I await what the minister has to say about that.

All the public bodies—such as HITRANS, HIE and Highland Council—must unite to demand appropriate sums of money to pay for those long-awaited transport improvements. Central Scotland has received a huge slice of taxpayers' money to spend on its transport projects in the first two sessions of the devolved Parliament. Now it must be the north's turn to receive money, because our economy can be unlocked to contribute even more to the national wealth than it currently does. However, there is no sign of things being satisfactorily costed or of a realistic plan being mapped out, as Fergus Ewing said.

We need an overall solution in a long-term transport projects plan. What benefit is there to Caithness and north Sutherland if travellers have a rail journey from Edinburgh to Inverness that takes under three hours, but still have to face a four-hour trip over a far shorter distance to Wick? How

would the cost of dualling the A9 to Inverness affect funding for road repairs on, for example, the Berriedale, Ord of Caithness and Helmsdale to Portgower sections of the A9? How can the A99 from Latheron to Wick—which is noted as one of the most dangerous roads in Scotland—be dealt with? We must consider a strategic road and rail plan that learns from the experience of Ireland, which has just committed €34.4 billion to an integrated plan over the next 10 years. However, we must remember that critics have said that building roads first and parts of railways later is not an acceptable way forward in this country.

In a smart, successful and sustainable Scotland, the transport network should help every area to play its part in the country's progress. Fergus Ewing's motion has begun to show us some of the missing links, and realistic costings of the proposals deserve serious study.

17:19

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I congratulate my friend and colleague Fergus Ewing on securing this debate and on initiating a debate—in which I hope all parties will engage—to try to come to the consensus that is required for a strategic shift in the arrangement of projects for the improvement of the transport network in the north of Scotland.

As members will know, I am not someone who often comes to the chamber and complains about anything, but there are rare occasions when I feel required to do so. I felt required to complain in a debate on 21 September last year about what I considered to be a lamentable lack of progress on projects close to my heart in my constituency. I am happy to say that the minister's word in that debate has been maintained absolutely on some of the key projects in my constituency. I am delighted that tonight's debate coincides with the announcement by the minister of the commencement of the tendering process following the publication of the orders for the improvement of the Ballinluig junction. He promised that in September and he has delivered it, despite having to leap over a couple of obstacles. I put on record that I welcome that, as well as the progress that has been made at the Bankfoot junction into the bargain.

Those are helpful steps forward, but what Mr Ewing's motion does is to give us a strategic canvas against which to look at some of the improvements that are taking place. I hope that the national strategy on which the minister is currently consulting will be the vehicle for agreeing the direction of public expenditure on transport infrastructure improvements in the next 20 to 30 years. In the course of that strategy, I will make a strong case in writing to the minister about the

importance of a commitment to dual the A9. Despite the incremental improvements that are being made, without a dual carriageway we will not tackle the inherent problems in road safety that result from the inadequacy of that road and the way in which it flits between single, dual and triple carriageway, which contributes to driver confusion.

We must also take strategic steps to move a large amount of freight off the roads and on to rail. During question time some months ago, I suggested to the minister the establishment of some form of freight consortium that would encourage more and more freight traffic to be moved from the roads and on to rail. I would be interested to hear an update to Parliament on the minister's warm welcome for that suggestion. That is the direction we must take: a co-ordinated series of measures. I hope that the debate on Mr Ewing's motion will help us in that direction.

17:22

**Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I thank Fergus Ewing for bringing this crucial issue to the chamber. When I first came to the Highlands and Islands as a graduate civil engineer in the 1970s, the streets were paved not with gold but with black gold, namely tar.

Regrettably, 30 years on, the same tar exists in patches. The roads I designed comprised 9in of bottoming, 4in of tar, drainage offlets, culverts and bridges. However, traffic demands have moved on, with timber lorries, petrol tankers and coaches pounding our roads. Our 1970s system cannot cope with such massive demands—new road specifications have recognised that. Just witness the depth of excavation and imported suitable material required to construct new carriageways. It may be helpful to draw an analogy between a wooden shed and road structure. If one fails to paint one's shed regularly, the wood will rot. If one fails to maintain the carriageway, the surface will crack, and the underlying structure, with inadequate drainage and frost heave, will collapse, necessitating multimillion-pound investments to upgrade it.

The A82 Tarbet to Inverness road is a prime example of that neglect, which has belatedly been recognised by the Executive. The A82 is one of the principal trunk road arteries to the Highlands, but it is an absolute disgrace. That is clearly illustrated by the fact that a particularly hazardous single-track stretch at Pulpit rock is still controlled by 30-year-old traffic lights.

In the 1990s, the Conservative Government bowed to increasing public pressure to upgrade the A82 south of Tarbet, which is now recognised as one of the most efficient and attractive trunk roads in Scotland.

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** Oh, come on.

**Dave Petrie:** Would Tavish Scott question that? It is an excellent trunk road. We are now demanding a similar upgrade from Tarbet to Inverness.

I addressed the Scottish Trades Union Congress conference in Inverness last weekend. The residents of Caithness are seriously concerned over future employment prospects with the closure of Dounreay. Irrespective of whether one believes in the nuclear industry, around 2,000 jobs will be lost and an upgraded transport infrastructure will be essential to attract replacement industries. That upgrade must include dualling the A9 and the A96 and improving rail links. I endorse John Swinney's comments on moving freight from road to rail, because that will put us in a win-win-win situation, with less wear and tear on an inadequate road network, more income for rail companies, and major environmental benefits.

The Executive's self-imposed embargo on transport investment has hit the Highlands and Islands particularly badly. An affordable and efficient transport infrastructure is essential to future economic growth. If this crisis is not immediately recognised and appropriate capital funding allocated to the aforementioned projects, the horrifying prospect of modern-day Highland clearances will increasingly become a reality.

17:25

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing this very important debate. Like him, I am struck by the frequency with which my constituents raise with me the state of local roads in Moray, particularly the A96, the A95 and the A9, which many of my constituents use regularly.

The number 1 priority is to improve the safety record of our local roads. I note with alarm that although during the past 10 years the number of road deaths in Scotland has fallen by 17 per cent, the number of road deaths in Moray has risen by 9 per cent.

The other key reason for upgrading the roads through Moray is that it would bring economic benefits. As members will know, Moray has not had economic challenges to seek and the biggest bit of the jigsaw for the achievement of economic prosperity is the upgrading of local roads, particularly the A96, which is the lifeline road running through Moray. The business community will depend on the upgrading of that road sooner rather than later.

Given the limits on time for speeches, I turn now to the Fochabers and Mosstodloch bypass, the

campaign for which has been running for decades. The project has been plagued by delay after delay. Finally, in 2002, after a long-running campaign by the local community that was supported by my predecessor, Margaret Ewing, ministers gave the green light to the bypass. However, here we are approaching 2007 and we are still waiting for the project to start. That is all because a handful of local objectors have launched a civil appeal that is going to the Court of Session. We now hear that the case will not be heard until May 2007 at the earliest, but the Scottish Court Service told the local community council in Fochabers and Mosstodloch that the case could have gone ahead in October 2006 or January 2007. We need the case to go ahead sooner rather than later. Why is it that a handful of objectors are able to delay the project time and again? If legal counsel for the objectors say that they are not prepared to go ahead in May 2007, will they be able to delay the case any further? Will the minister investigate the case? We cannot allow a major infrastructure project that is in the public interest to be held up yet again by a handful of objectors.

We accept that it might be a few years before we can dual the whole A96, but the priorities have to be the Fochabers and Elgin bypasses. It is disappointing that we have to wait for the new strategic review that is going to take us up to 2020 to take place. I assure the minister that the people of Elgin cannot wait until 2020 or anywhere near that for their bypass. The city of Elgin has an expanding population and major effort is under way in residential and commercial development. That will all be frustrated if there are bottlenecks and congestion in the middle of Elgin that can only go from bad to worse. Can we do what we can to expedite a decision on the Elgin bypass?

I invite the minister to visit Moray and speak to representatives of the local community about those two bypasses and the wider issues. He would find it a very productive visit. The issues facing the people of Moray are very urgent and it would be great if he could visit.

17:29

**Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing this well-attended debate. I am here to support his motion. In spite of having a grandfather and great-grandfather who worked for the west Highland railway, I am going to focus on roads and, as David Petrie did, I will focus on the A82, which is the main road artery into the west Highlands and Islands. I am sure that David Petrie will agree that it is a dangerous road. Even as careful a driver as I am once managed to career off via a couple of trees into the River Falloch. Ice was involved, but it was not in a glass.

Routes make markets and this route is inhibiting and stifling the economic development of and business in the west coast. It is better than it was 30 years ago—there have been some upgrades and some improvements are under way at the gorge in Glencoe—but some sections have not changed in the 40 years that I have been using it. Indeed, some sections, such as the stretch at Pulpit rock, have deteriorated so badly that they have fallen into the loch or have, for 30 of those 40 years, been subject to traffic lights and single-lane passage.

As Fergus Ewing pointed out, people have had enough. Three months ago, we held a 30<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of the traffic lights, which was managed by a very effective Fort William businessman called Stewart Maclean. After uniting opinion in Oban and Fort William to save local hospital services, Mr Maclean is now on the minister's case, clamouring for an improved A82.

People do not get fed up on a whim; the state of the A82 is a serious inhibitor that is making them lose time. For example, journeys from Glasgow to Oban and Fort William are taking 30 minutes longer than they ought to. As a result, not only has Inverness become a Cinderella city, but Oban and Fort William have become Cinderella towns. People are also dealing with higher transport costs; wear and tear to vehicles from poor surfaces and casual water on Loch Lomond side; and the prospect of accidents and injuries. This is simply becoming aversion therapy for visitors.

The A82 is strategic. If it is not improved along with the A9 and A96, we will not be able to encourage increases in investment, visitor numbers and the number of residents and returnees and ensure that we have a more diverse local economy. The state of the A82 sits with the lack of a level financial playing field, the lack of pervasive broadband services and the lack of affordable housing as a major inhibitor to economic resurgence in the west Highlands. It is time to transform the road into a major enabler, and I hope that this debate signals the start of that process.

17:32

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I welcome the chance to debate this motion. Although I should point out that I have not signed the motion, my support for part of it should become clear as my speech progresses.

Although the title of the motion refers to "Transport Links to the Highlands",

the motion itself focuses only on links to Inverness. Some members might think that the city is marginalised in that respect. However, no one

can deny that it is booming; it is the fastest-growing town in Scotland and is a model of accessibility compared with most of the Highlands. Indeed, it is quite hard to produce evidence that Inverness is being held back.

We have had several debates on proposals to dual the A9. Some have focused on the safety aspects of such a measure; others have focused on the need to upgrade the road to a dual carriageway simply because that is the modern thing to do. Of course, a dual carriageway is designed to carry twice the amount of traffic going at least 10mph faster, and I am not sure whether we can buy into such an objective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After all, roads must meet all road users' needs. If we want bus services, we need roads, but people who get off those buses must then be able to cross those roads.

I dare say that the accident statistics for the short stretch of dual carriageway on the A96 out of Inverness look good as far as pedestrian safety is concerned. However, that is because no pedestrian would ever set foot on it. The road runs from the town centre to just beyond a business park that includes, among other things, the town's only cinema. Although people might live anywhere between a mile and 3 miles from that cinema, no one would let their teenage child cycle there. The road is not meeting the needs of road users; it is purely car focused and is not fit for purpose.

I know that some people think that I am anti-car. However, I proved yesterday that I am not by hosting in the Parliament an event involving a very nice, very environmentally friendly car that runs on renewable hydrogen. After all, any transport policy that looks to the future must bear in mind that fossil fuels will not be around for ever. I also learned recently that only 1 per cent of the energy that goes into a car driven by the internal combustion engine—which, in any case, has never been any better than 30 per cent efficient—actually moves the driver. There must be a better way of getting people around than encasing each of them in a tonne or a tonne and a half of steel and putting them on a road.

That brings me to the part of the motion that I support, on the improvement of rail links. Such improvements are crucial if we are to bring our transport links into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We should start now, because major transport improvements have a long lead-in. We should start now in order to get modal shift from individual packages of steel moving individual people to something that allows us to move people and goods around the country effectively. The part of the motion that I do agree with is the part that addresses improvement in rail links. A single-track rail link leading from the central belt north is simply not fit for purpose; it would be laughed out of court in any other country

in Europe. Let us look beyond our present dependence on petrol, cars and roads. By all means let us invest in road improvements and maintenance, but not in expansion. Let us go for expanding the rail network.

17:35

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** I have no problem in supporting the motion. The trunk roads that Fergus Ewing mentioned—the A9, the A96 and the A82—were all mentioned in the Conservative manifesto as requiring upgrades. I thank the minister for the improvements to the dangerous junctions on the A9, and respectfully remind him that the last survey on dualling the A9 was done under the Conservatives in 1996. Dualling would have cost £275 million then and I suspect that it would be double that now, but I hope that he will look into the possibility.

On Monday evening, I drove from Perth to Aberdeen on the dual carriageway and was extremely envious of that road compared with my normal drive from Perth to Inverness on the A9, which, as everyone knows, is a two-lane road interspersed with sections of dual carriageway. I do not see why the citizens of Inverness and the people of the Highlands and Islands should have a road inferior to that available to the people of Aberdeen and the north-east. The comfort and feeling of safety of driving on the dual carriageway from Perth to Aberdeen left me still alert and relaxed, which was in sharp contrast to the fatigue that one feels having travelled the A9, especially when it is full of heavy lorries.

I can tell anyone that the experience of overtaking a long pantechinon with spray blowing on to the windshield is extremely hairy, to say the least; sitting behind one is equally frustrating and stressful. Such conditions on two-way roads undoubtedly lead to the large number of fatal accidents that sadly happen on the A9, the most dangerous road in Scotland, and it should be any Government's priority to dual the A9 to save lives and improve interconnections for people in the Highlands and Islands and for our important tourist industry. The northern A9, from Inverness to Scrabster, is also sorely in need of upgrading.

I referred to the number of heavy goods lorries on the A9. It would make a difference if more freight could be taken off that road and put on to the rail network. Tesco and Safeway used to run their goods on rail, but when Morrisons took over Safeway, the firm pulled out of rail and went back to the road. Tesco found that to be competitive it had to follow suit and go back to road transport. That has added a large number of lorries to the road that, frankly, need not be there, and encouragement should be given to get those companies to take their goods off the busy A9.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute left, Mr McGrigor.

**Mr McGrigor:** The A96, which was recently voted the most unpopular road in Scotland, is a main transport link for commuters in the area and needs a major upgrade to carry the increased volume of traffic. That is vital to those who live in Moray. The road sees many accidents that would not happen if some of the black spots were improved. The economy of Moray depends on the A96, but the road's capacity cannot cope with the present demand.

Dave Petrie and Jim Mather both spoke about the A82, but one of my main worries is about a spur of that road, the A85, of which a stretch between Tyndrum and Dalmally has recently, at great expense, been resurfaced without being realigned. I spoke to the contractors who did the job, and they informed me that many of the dangerous corners and bends that have taken numerous lives in car crashes could easily have been straightened out using the type of machinery that is now available. It goes through that kind of rock like a knife through butter. Instead, another layer of tarmac has been added, which simply makes people go faster round those same corners, making them even more dangerous. Good planning and realignment are the operations that are required, rather than the sticking-plaster solution of just more tar.

Our train services in the rural Highlands are quaint, but they lack the speed and regularity to form a real alternative to road transport in many areas, except for those who have time to sit and relax and look at the marvellous Highland scenery.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You should be finishing now.

**Mr McGrigor:** I am finishing, Presiding Officer. I would love to see a link from Crianlarich through Glen Ogle from west to east, but I do not suppose that that will be very high on the minister's list. At the start of the first session of Parliament, Sarah Boyack told us that we would get an integrated transport policy—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Finishing now seems to mean one thing to me and another to you, Mr McGrigor. You should finish now.

**Mr McGrigor:** I am afraid that we are still waiting for it.

17:39

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I hope that the Presiding Officer will also allow me to go 68 seconds over the allotted time.

I am the only member—bar one—who has no railway in his constituency. The Minister for

Transport has at least five licensed airports and I have none of those either. I say to Eleanor Scott that I also do not have a cinema in my constituency. Even though the roads mentioned in the motion do not come to my constituency, they are nonetheless of vital interest to my constituents and to me. My wife used to commute on the McBraynes bus to Inverness along the A82. The road might have been resurfaced since she used to make that journey, but it certainly has not been straightened.

The A96 is an important road for my constituents as it links us to Inverness. Aberdeenshire is statistically 2 per cent more rural than the Highlands and Inverness is an important hub to which many of my constituents travel. The A9 is an important road when one wants to avoid Aberdeen. We are waiting for the bypass; we will get it eventually. Indeed, I come to the Parliament by the A9 from time to time.

There are 107.49 miles of A9 between Inverness and Perth; 26.09 miles of that is dual carriageway, which is just over a quarter. If the remaining 81.4 miles of the A9 were dualled, that would have some interesting effects. The speed that a heavy goods vehicle can travel at rises from 40mph to 50mph on dual carriageways and the speed at which a smaller goods vehicle can travel rises from 50mph to 60mph. That means that, in the same time, an HGV can travel 15 miles further. The important point is that that extends how far a commercial driver can travel within the time limits. It reduces the number of overnight stops and increases the distances that buses and lorries driven by commercial drivers can go. That is one illustration of the important commercial benefits—besides all the safety benefits—of dualling our roads. The dualling of the road would benefit towns north of Inverness as well as, in my case, towns to the east of Inverness.

Ultimately, I hope that I am currying favour with those who are more fortunate than me. I say to the minister that I hope that we get the dualling of those routes into the programme. Then we can start to negotiate about the needs of other parts of Scotland, which include, of course, not a dual carriageway to Fraserburgh, but a motorway.

17:42

**Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I apologise to the Presiding Officer and to the minister, as I have to leave immediately after my speech. Fergus Ewing suggested that Inverness is a Cinderella; I will be Cinderella tonight. I have to be at Ingliston for 7 o'clock, but unlike Cinderella I do not have a fairy godmother to transform me immediately.

For the first 17 years of my life I lived less than 50 yards from the A96 on a farm that bordered the

road. I have memories from my childhood of the deaths of several of our sheepdogs on the road, rather than of the adult deaths about which my parents probably spoke. I cycled along the road many times and never thought that it was particularly dangerous—save for snow and ice at times.

In the past few years, the situation could not have become more different. Whether someone is driving, walking or cycling they have to have their wits about them all the time.

Fergus Ewing is right to say that the main cities in Scotland must be connected by rapid dual carriageways. Why should Inverness and Aberdeen—the oil capital of Europe—be deprived of that?

As my colleague Richard Lochhead said, creating a dual carriageway on the A96 would create more jobs, which are desperately needed in the larger towns of Elgin and Huntly.

The A96 has several crawler lanes. According to roads engineers and roads managers from the former Grampian Regional Council and the current Aberdeenshire Council, those lanes were supposed to be a temporary measure until the stretches of road were dualled, but today we are still putting in more crawler lanes.

There were eight deaths on the A96 in the first three years of the Parliament, but in the three years after that there were 19.

A friend contacted me this morning who yesterday drove from Aberdeen to Inverness—a distance of 98 miles. On a dual carriageway, or on a good day, it should take about 1 hour and 45 minutes. Yesterday, it took three hours and 45 minutes, even with detours to avoid the major hold-ups on either side of Elgin. Such delays cost employers and businesses a fortune. We are still waiting for the bypass at Fochabers and we will need one at Keith if there is to be a large supermarket in the middle of the town. That is not taking account of the fact that the blockage at the Haudagain roundabout in Aberdeen has been exacerbated by the delayed decision on the Aberdeen western peripheral route. I have not talked about the necessity of dealing with the rail and road blockage at Inveramsay bridge. The minister already knows my views on the rail links between Aberdeen and Inverness, which he heard in the debate on Aberdeen crossrail.

Fergus Ewing's call has the backing of many organisations—yesterday, I managed to get the backing of Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce—so we would like some indication soon of the timetable for upgrading the roads.

17:46

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** On the whole, the debate has been informative: there have been one or two flashes of rhetorical nonsense, but it has been useful for all that. I am grateful to Fergus Ewing for lodging the motion and have much sympathy with many of the arguments that have been made about the road and rail links.

There has been strong emphasis on the road links rather than the rail links. With the exception of Rob Gibson and Eleanor Scott, most members' major focus was on the road links, although they may have mentioned rail. To some extent, that reflects the reality of constituents' views on the matter.

We have to be clear about where and how road and rail interact. That is why the strategic projects review—about which we have talked in the Parliament on a number of occasions—will assess the differences and linkages between public transport and the road network on each individual route, corridor by corridor.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Will the minister give way?

**Tavish Scott:** I need to make a bit of progress first.

I welcome Fergus Ewing's plea to take the politics out of transport. I agree with him that that would be good to achieve but, when I read his press releases and cuttings, it seems to me that we have a way to go first. If he is saying that a strategic projects review on the back of a national transport strategy that, as John Swinney rightly pointed out, is open for consultation at the moment is the way to construct the best assessment of transport priorities throughout Scotland and for the links within the Highlands, I agree with him. However, any Government of any political persuasion must be clear that that process leads to clear choices between different priorities over a period of time.

I noticed that, in *The Press and Journal* on 17 June, Mr Ewing said that the upgrade may take 10 or 20 years. I agree. It is laudable that he now accepts that we must be clear about the timescale over which the design, procurement, tendering and then delivery of projects need to be managed. It is good news that he takes that view.

**Mr Swinney:** Do I take it from what the minister says that a debate such as the one that Mr Ewing initiated tonight contributes to reinforcing what the minister is working to achieve, which is to translate a national strategy into a set of priorities that, regardless of the politics of the Administration within the Scottish Executive, will provide continuity over 20 or 30 years to achieve individual project priorities and make progress on the issues that concern our constituents?

**Tavish Scott:** I am grateful that Mr Ewing is adopting my approach to the matter, which is to have a national transport strategy. If the Scottish National Party is doing that as well, I applaud that. We are objectively considering the important priorities for transport links throughout Scotland on the basis of a robust analysis. That work is not only for the Government, but for the regional transport partnerships, such as the one in the Highlands that is chaired by Charlie King, or the one in north-east Scotland that is chaired by Alison McInnes.

The regional transport partnerships will be important in sorting out priorities and dealing with transport needs. That is how we will have to proceed with the spending of transport moneys. I applaud all members who wish to be part of that process and to present objective arguments.

I ask John Swinney and others to believe me when I say that the Government has plenty of other priorities. Mr Swinney's party, my party and other parties will have their own priorities. The transport portfolio could lose moneys to other priorities. I say to Mr Swinney and others that making the most objective case for transport spending will have to be done irrespective of who is Minister for Transport on any said future day in this Parliament.

Members have made a number of fair points. However, despite what some have said, the Executive has invested a considerable amount in the areas that we are discussing and across the rest of Scotland. We have invested £22 million in the A82; £45 million in the A9; and £36 million in the A96. Mr Swinney mentioned the Ballinluig junction. I share his pleasure that that work is going ahead and I share his frustration over the length of time it has taken. I ask members to believe me—I do not spend my working day trying to block things. I spend an awful lot of my working day trying to develop things and to make them happen. I do that to the best of my ability.

The A82 improvements that we announced recently—for Pulpit rock and the bypass at Crianlarich—are important. I was grateful for the welcome that those measures received from local people and businesses alike.

Work is going on in relation to the A9, the A82 and the A96—and not only in the context of the strategic projects review. Members will be familiar with the design work that I have commissioned on dualling between Inverness and Inverness airport. Such projects are important stages in the process and I hope that that will be acknowledged.

**Stewart Stevenson:** The minister will know that SNP members have long argued for an approach to financing projects that is different from the private finance initiative or public-private

partnership model. A trust could spread money across many projects. Would not spreading the cost over a long period in a way that succeeding Governments would find difficult to escape from be a way of delivering long-term commitments? Will the minister therefore join me in developing our ideas on financing projects?

**Tavish Scott:** I do not want to be drawn into a different debate. Mr Stevenson raises a serious point. The financing of roads and other transport projects is a serious issue, but it is not an issue for this evening. I will simply observe that, whether Mr Stevenson's model or the PPP model is used, we are talking about 30 years' expenditure. Assessments are made on a 30-year basis. I think that that is the right way forward.

Mr Lochhead spoke about Fochabers. I share his frustration about the time the project has taken and I will be happy—well, happy is the wrong word—to chase on what is happening. Mr Lochhead knows the process and that it is not easy and must be dealt with appropriately. It is not for ministers to tell the judicial system how to go about its business.

We are making significant progress on rail services. I take members' points about improvements, but would stress that the work on the rail utilisation study is about reducing the time required for journeys between Inverness and the south.

I acknowledge that some of the challenges that Mr Ewing and other colleagues have described are borne of success. I agree with Eleanor Scott when she says that Inverness is growing and booming. That growth is very positive for the Highlands. Employment in Inverness has increased by 17 per cent since this Parliament came into being and the rate of population increase there is one of the highest in Scotland. Now and again, Mr Ewing does not accept such good points about the Highlands and Islands, but I am keen to make them. However, I accept that a transport infrastructure must be part of the future for the Highlands and Islands. That is what we are committed to delivering.

*Meeting closed at 17:55.*







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